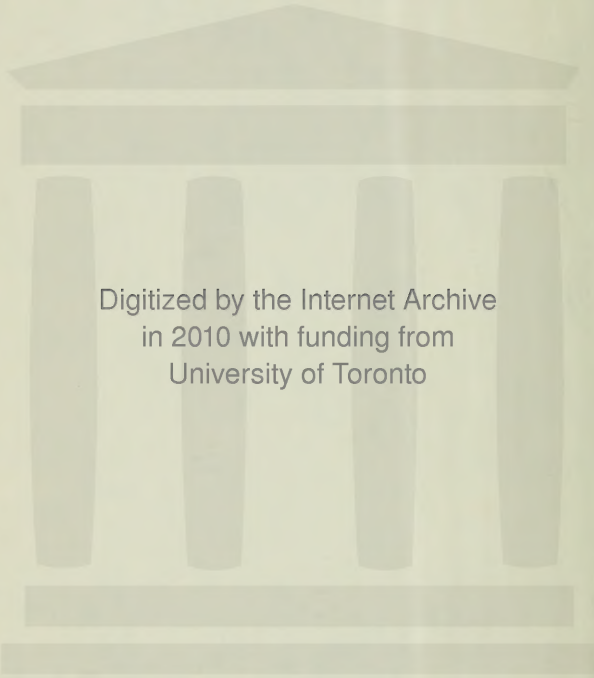
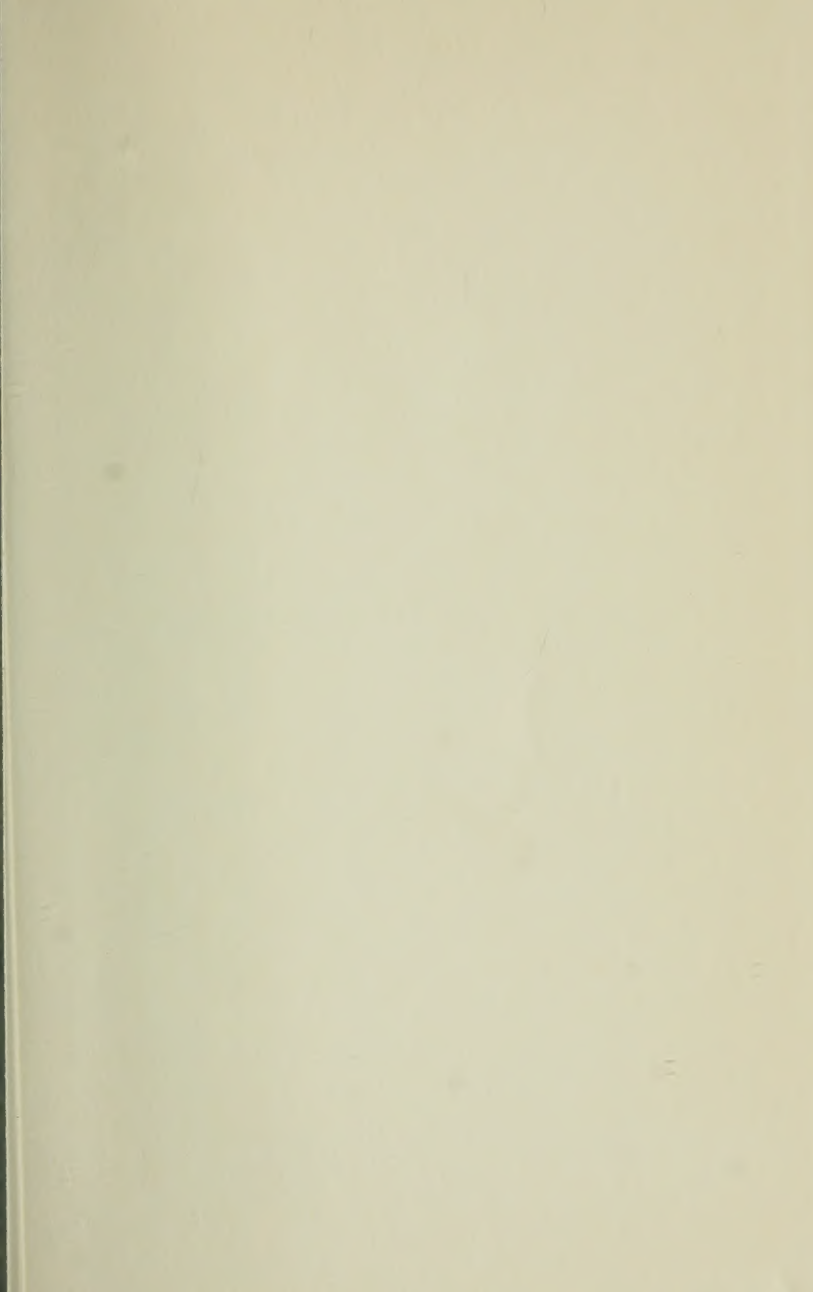
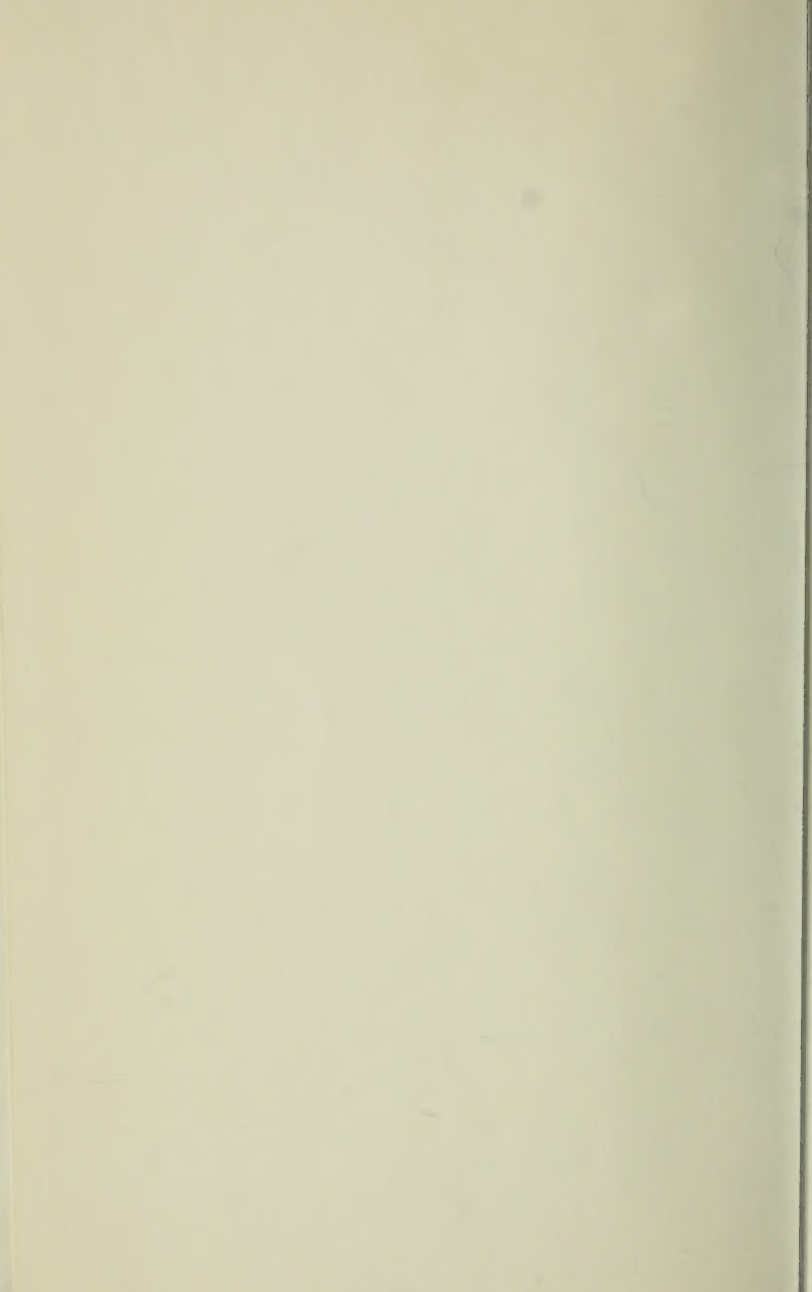


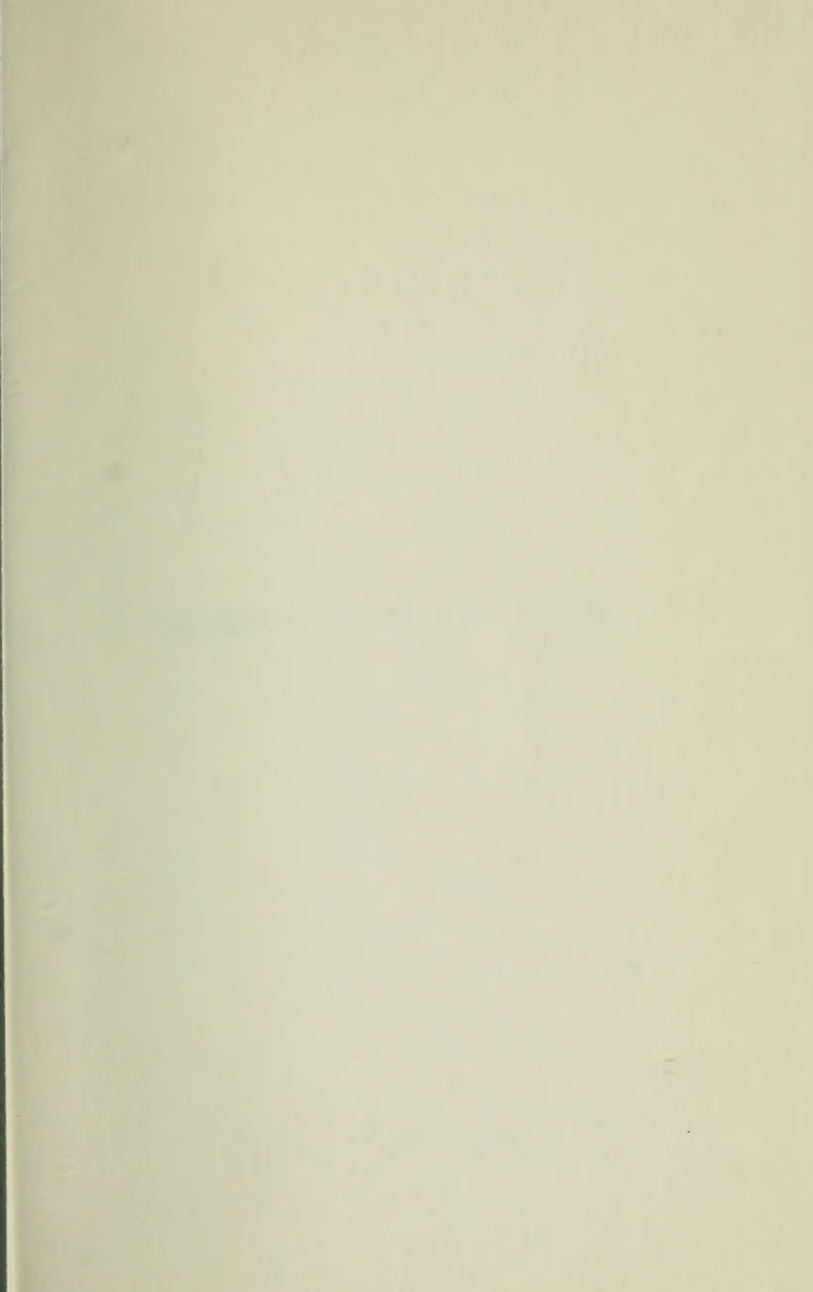
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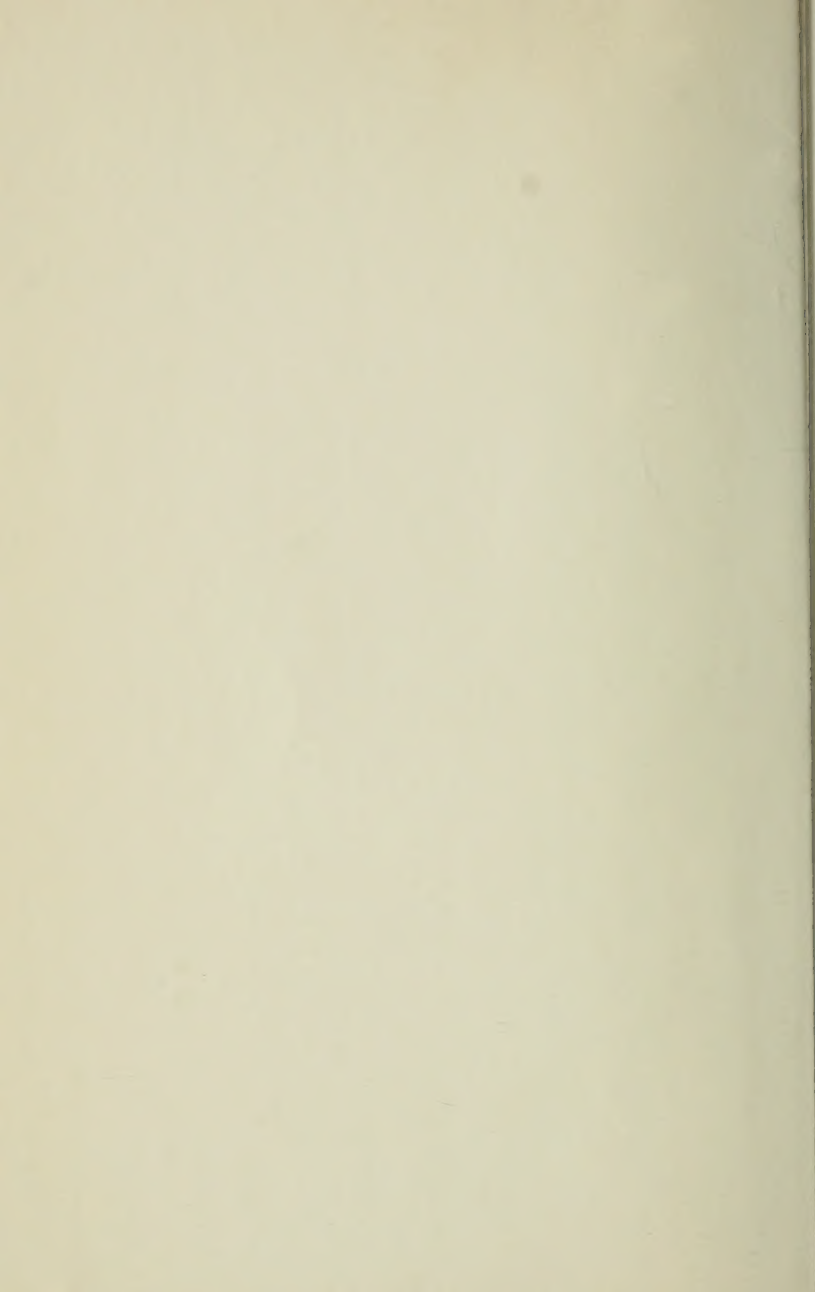


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ORPHEUS WITH HIS LUTE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE GOLDEN PORCH

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upon the myths of Pindar.

LONDON: EDWARD ARNOLD

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THE RETURN OF PERSEPHONE

From the painting by LORD LEIGHTON in the City Art Gallery, Leeds

[See page 131]

ORPHEUS WITH HIS LUTE

STORIES OF THE WORLD'S SPRINGTIME

BY

W. M. L. HUTCHINSON

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN PORCH," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON

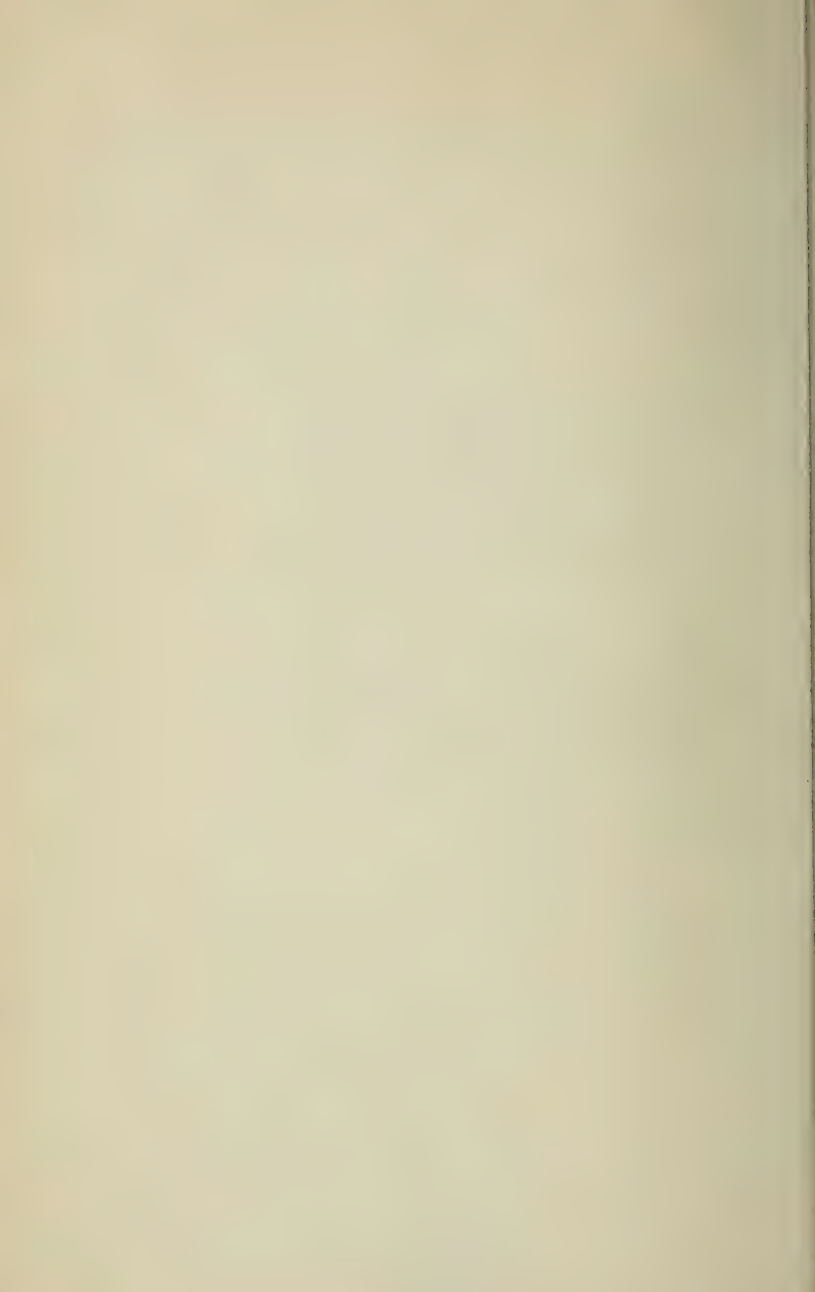
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1909

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“Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain-tops that freeze
Bow themselves when he did sing :
To his music plants and flowers
Ever sprung ; as sun and showers
There had made a lasting Spring.

Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads and then lay by.
In sweet Music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or hearing, die.”



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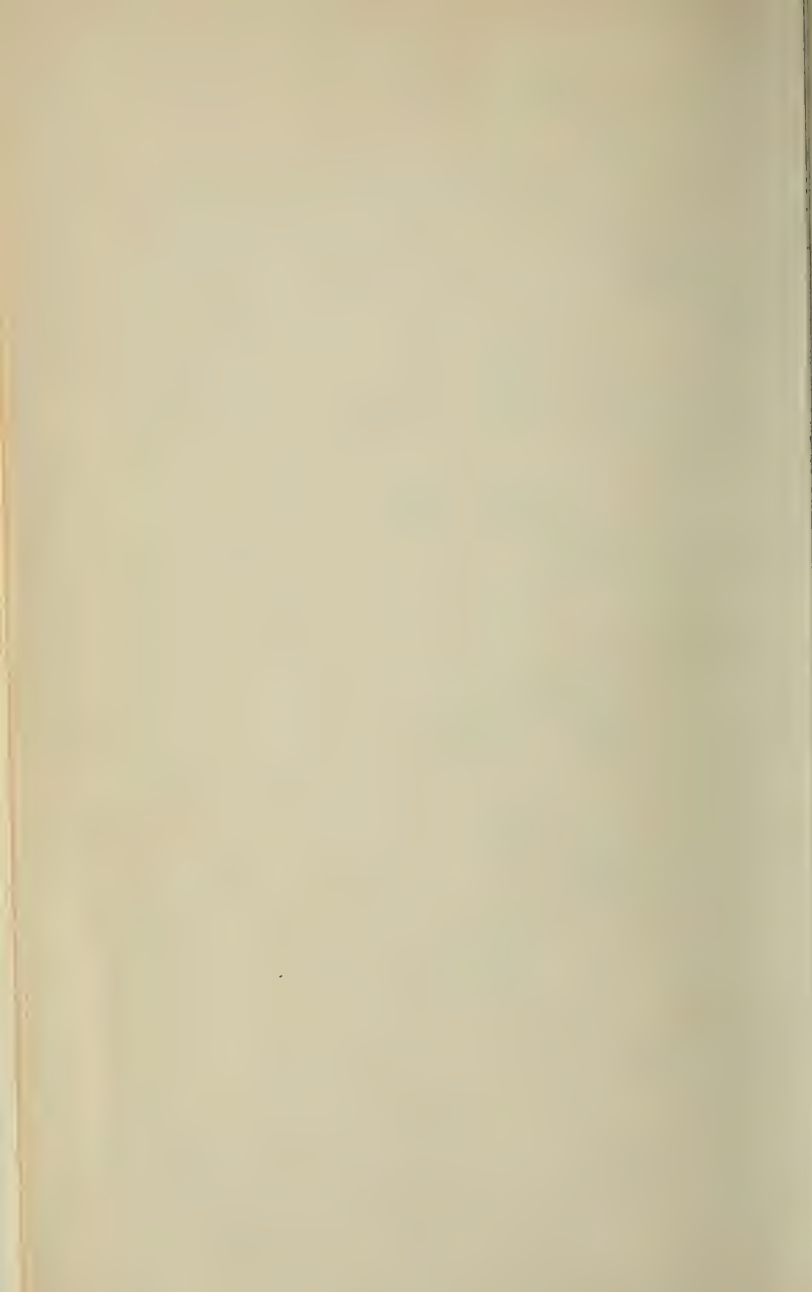
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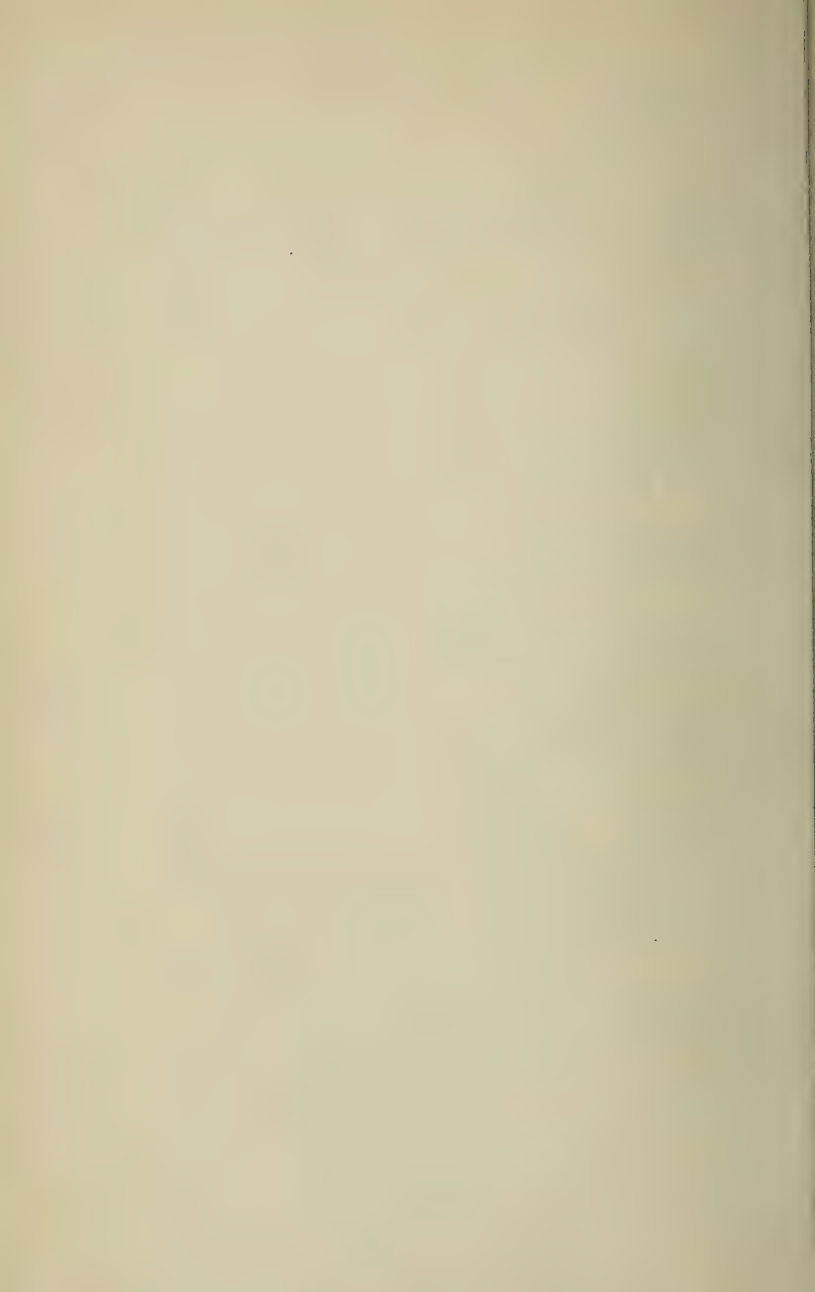
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PART I

THE

MAKING OF A MINSTREL

CHAPTER I

THE WELL IN THE FOREST

ONE Midsummer Eve, many many hundred years ago, a little fair-haired boy lay asleep beside a well in the depths of a great oak-wood. He had wandered far that day in the forest that covered the hillsides around his home, and when twilight began to fall he had sat down to rest beside this well, which he had never seen before. It was a spring of water clear as crystal, bubbling up from deep within the ground, and, what was strange to see in that lonely spot, it was enclosed with a well-head of carved marble, such as were set up in market-places and temple-

courts. The child could tell that this was some very sacred fount, from the number of wild-flower garlands hanging about it. All the blossoms were fresh and sweet, as though newly gathered, but he had seen with wonder that they were of every season—the violets and hyacinths of spring, the pale autumn crocus, and the white hellebore that blooms at midwinter, were mingled with the June musk-roses and honeysuckle. But stranger still, when he dipped his little palms, curved together for a cup, into the well and drank, the bubbling water became as the surface of a mirror, wherein a face like his own, yet not his own, smiled up at him out of shadowy depths. “Some one is peeping over my shoulder,” he thought, and turned quickly round, but there was no one there. Yet so sweet and fair was the face that he was not afraid, and bent down to look on it again, but behold the mirror was gone and the fountain bubbled as before. At the same moment drowsiness came over him; he lay down on the soft emerald turf and fell fast asleep.

The twilight deepened into dusk, but soon the gloom of the forest was chequered with silver splendour as the midsummer moon swam up the sky. In her lovely light the giant oak-

tree boles that encompassed the open plot of greensward round the well shone like buttresses of pearl set against a circling rampart of ebony. And the child was as safe within that circle as if it had been in reality a castle-wall, for he was come to enchanted ground. No wolf or lion of the hills, no fiercest hawk or eagle durst follow its prey into that glade; no venomous snake or other hurtful creeping thing could lurk there, nor worm nor snail deface its tender herbage. Not even a plant could grow there if it were deadly to man or beast, and you might seek in vain for the dark-berried nightshade and poisonous scarlet toadcaps that were rife elsewhere in the forest. There snow and hail never fell, and the sentinel oaks kept guard forever in a mild and serene air, even when their brethren on the hills around were scourged by the tempest or riven by the thunderbolt. This night so deep a stillness reigned there, save for the plashing of the fountain, that you might have heard the soft breathing of the sleeping child. Now at first you would have heard him sigh in his sleep, and seen tears glitter on his curled lashes, for he was dreaming of what had befallen the day before, to send him wandering far from home and play-mates.

But presently he smiled, for he began to hear, in his dream, the lilt of a nightingale. First in single liquid notes, then in a gush of melody, the bird was pouring forth the mysterious rapture of her heart. She ceased, but another forthwith burst into song, another, and yet another, until it seemed to the dreamer that he counted nine singing together. Nearer and nearer came the sound, and now he began to make out words of human speech in the warbling of the unseen birds.

"I must be dreaming," he said out loud, and with that he awoke and sat up, looking about him in the bright moonlight. Still he heard close at hand the voices of his dream, and still they were like the voices of nightingales, but he saw now whence they came. On the level lawn nine tall and lovely ladies were dancing, hand-in-hand, a slow and stately measure to the music of their own clear singing. They were clad in flowing robes of white, girdled about with broad golden girdles, and on each queenly head was a crown of violets.

"They are the fairies of this fountain," thought the little boy, and he viewed them with breathless wonder, yet with no fear, for he knew that fairies are kindly to all children except

to such as are cruel, or greedy, or unmannerly enough to spy upon their doings and speak to them without waiting to be spoken to. So he lay down again and closed his eyes, till they should either see and speak to him or go away.

Almost immediately the song ended, and soft fingers touched his curls, while a sweet voice said—

“Little Orpheus, are you asleep again?”

He opened his eyes and saw the beautiful singers bending over him with friendly, gracious faces.

“I was not asleep,” he answered shyly, “but I thought it might make you angry if I watched you. Indeed, I did not come here to pry—only to rest—I was so tired—I had run away,” and at this the tears *would* come again; but he brushed them away and went on, “I would tell you why, but perhaps you know that too, as well as my name.”

She who had stroked his hair stooped and kissed him with a tender laugh.

“Perhaps we do,” she said; “but we should like you to tell us. My sisters and I, you must know, are great lovers of stories, so sit beside me and let us hear all your adventures.”

With that she seated herself on the grass,

6 ORPHEUS WITH HIS LUTE

leaning against the marble well-head, and drew the child down beside her. The other sisters sat down also, and bent their clear gaze on him in silence.

"I have so little to tell," began Orpheus, and then hung his head abashed, for he thought to himself that those great fairies might laugh at him, as others had laughed, with the mocking laughter that hurts, only a few hours ago. But the radiant ladies encouraged him with gentlest words and glances, so that little by little they drew from him all his story.

Now I tell it not as he told it, with many pauses, and by dint of much questioning, but as it befell, and as it was known already to those fair listeners.

Orpheus was the only child of a poor wood-cutter, and had lost his mother before he could remember her. His father's hut stood on the outskirts of the great oak-wood, a long way from the nearest village, and their only neighbours were a few other woodcutters and their families. These forest-dwellers were a wild folk, and though Orpheus loved the children, his play-mates, their rough gambols wearied him. His happiest hours were spent alone in the forest, listening to the song of the birds or the wind

that made music in the boughs. It seemed to the child that all the woodland voices had a message for him, if he could but understand it, and the secret dream of his heart was that some day he should understand, and teach that message to others. Meanwhile he began to make little songs out of his fancies about what the birds were telling one another, and the stories of other lands that the wandering breeze kept whispering to the oaks, and the fairy gossip that made the brooks tinkle with laughter as they hurried along repeating it to all their neighbour flowers. As for the tunes, they came of themselves, and they took hold upon the ear like the rippling of water, and like the sougling of wind, and like the cooing of doves. But for a long while Orpheus kept these songs to himself; he felt that the other children would not like them half so well as the old rhymes they sang in their games:—

“The frog he leads a jolly life,”

or the Tortoise song—

“Shellyback, shellyback, what do you spin?
Blankets to wrap my baby in!”

Now at Midsummer the village near the forest

ORPHEUS WITH HIS LUTE

kept high festival for three days, and all the woodcutters went down thither, laden with faggots for the bonfires that would be lit on Midsummer Eve, and their children who were old enough to walk so far went with them to see the merry-making. When Orpheus was nine years old his father took him for the first time to the village, on the day before Midsummer Eve. Already the yearly fair was begun in the market-place, which was thronged with folk from all the country-side, and all day long there was feasting and rustic mirth, sports of young men, and dancing of maidens to the sound of pipe and tabor. But towards evening there came a wandering minstrel to the village, who began to sing an ancient ballad to his harp. Then the pedlars' booths of green willow were deserted, the feasters forgot their wine and the maidens their dances, and young and old crowded eagerly round the singer. It was of a battle long ago that he sang; of how serried ranks of foemen went down before some doughty chief like corn before the reaper; of the blood of warriors poured out like water and their haughty crests trampled in the dust; of the neighing of warsteeds and the rattle of chariots, the noise of the captains and the shouting. Louder and louder chanted the minstrel,

striking his harp the while until the strings clanged like swordstrokes upon armour ; now his eyes gleamed as though he saw before him that of which he told, and now the faces of his listeners were lit up with fierce glee, and each man clenched his hand upon his staff as though he gripped a spear. Even the children laughed and shouted and shook their little fists. When the minstrel ceased the bystanders loaded him with praises, and well-nigh quarrelled for the honour of giving him bed and board that night. The fairest maid of the village proffered him wine in a new beechen bicker, cunningly carved and bright with waxen polish, which she bade him keep for her sake, though her shepherd sweetheart, she said, had made her a gift of it that same day. And the shepherd, with a laugh, said that he could not grudge her bestowing it on one who sang so good a song.

“ Well said, Corydon,” cried a white-haired villager, “ ’twas a song your brave grandsire would have joyed in had the Fates spared him to hear it. By Pan, it minds me of the good old days when he could handle a spear with the best—and so could I, neighbours. But I can never deny he was the better swordsman—ay, the Thracian crows would have picked my bones but for that

last stand he made. May the earth lie light upon him ! ”

Orpheus looked at the old man, and saw a tear steal down his withered cheek as he thus spoke. The child had shuddered at the song which so pleased the rest; to him the vision of battle it conjured up was horrible. It was no shout of victory, but gasping sobs of the dying, that he heard in those harsh chords, and as the uncouth rhymes told how warrior after warrior fell, and the manner of each death-wound, he seemed to see the cruel steel crash through bone and sinew, and the beautiful living bodies smitten into hideous wrecks of what they were. How could any one endure to hear or to tell of things like these ?

But at the old villager's words another picture rose before him—two friends stood shoulder to shoulder in the fray, hard-pressed by the foemen, and the one fought like a lion at bay to guard the other, who reeled as though sore wounded. Was it so the dead comrade had made his last stand, long ago, against the wild borderers of Thrace ? Ah ! this vision, at least, was beautiful, and it was the song that had brought it back to this old man out of the past ! Suddenly a great envy of the minstrel's lot possessed the boy ; he

thought he must be the happiest man alive, not because men so praised him, nor even because he could delight them, but because he had this power to make them see the things of which he sang. Had not he shown him, Orpheus, another world outside the little forest-world which was all he knew, and if it was a world full of strife and bloodshed, yet were there not greater things in it than he had dreamed of?

He understood, dimly, that there was beauty where at first he had only been able to see pain and horror; he had been wrong to fancy that these men who loved to hear of battle found pleasure in what was merely ugly and cruel. To each of them, perhaps, the song had brought some noble message, stirring their hearts, as the aged peasant's was stirred by it to remember the friend who saved him. Orpheus felt also that if the minstrel had not told so grimly and plainly just how men fought and died, even as though he himself had seen it all, his song would have been more pleasant to hear, but would never have brought tears to old eyes or opened a young heart to understand them. This, then, must be the secret of a singer's power, that without thought of praise or blame he utters the simple truth of things as it is given him to see it.

Such thoughts had the child as he took his way homeward with his company. The woodcutters had supped and rested some hours in the village, but ere break of dawn they were afoot on the road to the forest, for they were too poor to lose more than one day's work in holiday-making. When they came to the hut of Oiagros, he bade the rest break their fast there before going to their several homes, which they did, having brought back stores of meal, cheese, and garlic from the village in exchange for their faggots. Oiagros himself brought out a jar of rough wine, and another of goat's milk, and when Orpheus had made a fire of sticks before the hut, he helped to knead and bake the barley bannocks, for being motherless he had learned already to do such work for his father. Now the rest ate and drank and were merry, and talked of the doings at the fair, but Orpheus took his portion a little apart, and sat silent, and his playmates wondered at him. It was said in that country that if you saw a wolf, and the wolf had caught sight of you first, you would be dumb for three days. So one of the children called out, "Orpheus has seen a wolf! Look how he sits tongue-tied! Never a word has he given us all the way hither, and still he cannot speak." The

men looked round, and smiled at his grave little face, and his father asked him what he was thinking of so earnestly.

"I am thinking of the minstrel," said the child.

"And what of him?" said his father.

Orpheus blushed, but he answered steadily, "I am thinking I would rather be what he is than anything in the world, and so I will be, when I grow up."

"Why not?" said his father kindly; but another woodcutter said—

"Neighbour, you do ill to let the boy harbour such fancies. By what I hear, he is overmuch given to day-dreams, and in a fair way to grow up an idler and vagabond, instead of a prop to your old age."

"Mine will be the loss then," said Oiagros, "and, with your pardon, I will rule my own bairn after my own fashion. It is a good bairn, and a biddable, and while I can say that, he may dream all he will, for me."

"Nay, take it not amiss," answered the other, "I did but mean that folk with their bread to earn can have naught to do with song-making and harp-twanging. These are pastimes for the rich, not for us or our children."

"Ay," said a younger woodman, "but the rich

pay richly to hear that same harp-twanging—very wisely, to my thought, for what better treat could a man wish for than yonder minstrel gave us? This little lad, maybe, thinks his trade well worth the following.”

“And so it is, for such as can get skill of it,” cried the woodman who had just spoken; “but how is the boy to come by that, I pray you? ’Tis a known thing that a minstrel must see men and cities if he would gain matter for song, and as for the manner, do rhyming and playing the harp come by nature to a man, like singing to a bird? Tell me that, neighbours.” Then, turning to Orpheus, “Will you seek teachers in the forest, boy?” he asked with a scornful laugh.

“I have found them,” said Orpheus simply; “I often hear them making music.”

“And who may they be?” said the woodman. “It is news to me that any of our folk can make music, save to troll an old-world ditty over their cups.”

“They are the North Wind and the West Wind,” answered the child, “and all the song-birds, and the little brooks besides.”

At this answer all the men except his father were moved to great laughter, and the children, who were listening open-mouthed, laughed louder

still. Two or three of the men began teasing him to tell them what these fine teachers had taught him, and to show how he had profited in minstrelsy by singing a song forthwith. Orpheus was shy of nature, but he felt a new overmastering impulse, as though the beloved forest voices strove to utter themselves through his lips, and before he was aware he had stood up and begun to sing. Words and a tune to fit them flowed into his mind, he knew not whence or how, and he sang them with the flute-like cadences of a blackbird. And the listeners, taken by surprise at his boldness, held their peace. But his song seemed to them to have no sense in it, for it was not about fighting, or deeds of gods and heroes (which all real minstrels, they knew, ought to sing of), but it told the story of a flower that Orpheus had seen blooming on the reed-fringed margin of a pool. He sang how a lad, Narcissus by name, who loved, even as he, to roam in the woods, came one day to this pool, and saw a boy's face therein, fair and sweetly smiling. And how Narcissus longed after the beautiful boy so much that he could not leave the sight of him, but watched and waited night and day beside the pool, begging him to come out and be his playfellow. Sometimes he wept as he pleaded, and then the strange boy wept

too, yet would not answer nor come forth, and so day by day Narcissus pined with longing, until he dwindled away, and changed at last into a tall, pale flower that still bends its head to gaze into the pool. For he never knew that it was his own face he saw mirrored in the quiet water that now all summer long mirrors the white narcissus.

Thus sang Orpheus to the woodmen, and in the tones of his young voice there was a lulling sweetness as of honey, so that they, for all they would fain have mocked at the tale, sat spell-bound by the appeasing harmony. But when he ceased they broke afresh into jeering laughter, and assailed him with many a taunt and gibe, craving his pardon for having taken so great a minstrel for one Orpheus, son of Oiagros the woodcutter, an ignorant little groundling. Knowing no better, they said, they had been content hitherto with lays concerning kings and famous warriors of old, but henceforth nothing should please them but the adventures of Prince Narcissus and his noble friends Bulrush and Chickweed. Their words were light, but they spoke so bitterly, and cast such black looks upon the boy that he stood trembling and bewildered. What could there be in his singing, even if they despised it, to make

them turn upon him like this—his father's friends, who had never given him an unkind word before?

Now, in truth these men were not evil-hearted for all their roughness, and they did not know themselves why a child's foolish song should anywise move them; they only felt, with fear and anger, that a nameless power in his singing had made them its thralls in their own despite. To each, as he listened, it had seemed that he was held speechless by the working of an unknown magic, and each, when the spell was broken, was eager to mask his strange uneasiness under a show of boisterous merriment. Yet in their hearts they were afraid of Orpheus while they mocked him, and because they could not understand what he had done to them, nor how he had done it, they not only feared but hated him as he stood there, so young and small, with his troubled, innocent face. Innocent! Was not his innocence mere seeming, after all, for must *he* not have known, they wondered, that his singing was—well, not like other singing? There *could* be nothing in the words—stupid baby rhymes about a common flower—but how about the tune? Every one knew that some tunes were not canny—there were chants known to those skilled in leechcraft that would charm away a fever, and others, it was

whispered, that could bring hurt instead of healing. Who had made them it was best not to ask, but certainly no minstrels of flesh and blood. None of the woodcutters could imagine how the mere child Orpheus was had learned such a strain, yet the thought was present to them all that Something he had met in the forest might have taught him thus to bewitch them. This was what came of letting a boy haunt the woods alone !

Little thought Orpheus what was passing in their minds. He turned from their angry faces to seek comfort in one that had never looked on him but lovingly. And behold, his father was gazing at him with a look so strange, so full of anguish, that it pierced his very heart. The child could bear no more ; worse, more bewildering than all, he had somehow grieved his father, perhaps shamed him before his friends. As he made a faltering step towards him, Oiagros hid his face in his hands. Then, with a cry like a stricken fawn, Orpheus bounded out of the group of woodmen and fled into the sheltering forest.

CHAPTER II

THE DAWN OF THE WORLD

ORPHEUS, as I have said already, did not tell the Nine Sisters quite so much of his story as has been set down here. But he told them as much as he knew himself, and as for the rest, that is to say, the beauty of his singing and the way in which it had wrought upon the woodmen, it was as plain to them as though they had been by while he sang. And how this could be will presently appear. The last thing he told them was his rushing away—he cared not whither—from the sight of his father's bowed head, believing that even he had turned from him and loved him no longer; and at the thought of that the child wept afresh.

Then the lady who had first spoken to him drew him closer to her and said, looking full into his eyes, "Will you trust me, my child, if I say to you that I know what grieved your

father, and it was nothing you have done, nor did he turn from you wittingly, but his mind was far away when you saw his gaze fixed upon you? More I cannot tell you, for the time is not yet come when you will understand all the truth."

Orpheus looked earnestly into her great clear eyes, and a weight seemed lifted from his heart. "Gracious Lady," he said, "indeed I will trust you, for something tells me you are my friend, though I have never seen you before."

"Are you so sure of that?" said the Lady smiling. "Look at me again."

Orpheus did so, and "O!" he cried, "it was your face I saw when I drank out of this well, before I fell asleep."

"Then you must have seen it before," said the Lady, "for this is the Well of Memory, and when any one drinks of it, it shows him something he remembers, though he may not know he remembers it."

"It is all so strange here," said Orpheus slowly, "that I am hardly sure if I am awake or dreaming, but now I do feel that I have seen you—long ago when I was very little. May I not ask, Lady, when it was, and who you are?"

"I am called Calliope," she said, "and this

much I will tell you, that you have no nearer or dearer friend than I am. Once, years ago, you did see me, and I have often been with you when you saw me not, and you have heard my voice in many a dream. But you are not dreaming now, little Orpheus. Come, are you not weary still, and hungry? We have better fare for you here than the wild raspberries that you found while you were wandering hither."

So saying, she arose, stepped to the nearest tree, and from a hollow within it drew forth a piece of honeycomb, brimful of amber honey. Another of the Sisters, taking up a hollow wand of fennel, sank it deep into the yielding sward, and lo, a jet of warm white milk spouted therefrom, which a third Sister caught in a golden bowl. Calliope mingled honey and milk together, and cast the seeds of a certain flower into the posset, and gave it to the wondering child. He drank and was refreshed, and all weariness passed away from him.

Then these fairy Ladies began to speak to him again of the desire he had to become a minstrel, and he told them sadly that he saw it could never be; he knew nothing—how should he?—of a real minstrel's lore—tales of the mighty deeds of gods and heroes. These alone were

what men cared to hear, and there was no one in the forest who could teach them to him. No, he would sing no more, except to trees and flowers, for they, perhaps, could understand his singing; but to his own kind it was plainly a foolish and a hateful thing.

"Child," said Calliope, "what if were granted you to find teachers in secret, singers who have heard like you the music of winds and waters, but have heard also the music made in heaven by bright Apollo's lute, and are wise with all the wisdom of that golden-haired god, who is both minstrel and seer? What if they, who know the number of the ocean sands and of the forest leaves, and all things that have been, and are, and are to come, should give you so much of their knowledge as it is lawful for a mortal to enjoy? Your look tells me that you guess of whom I speak. Yes, it is we, my sisters and I, who can do this for you, if you desire it."

"I desire it with my whole heart," said Orpheus, his voice trembling with awe and wonder.

"Nay," said Calliope. "Hear me a moment yet. A choice is set before you this night, for you are come to the parting of two ways. It is in our power to blot from your remembrance

all that has passed since you heard the minstrel in the village, and make others forget also that you sang to them as you did. So one way you may take is to return home, and live the life of other woodmen, until you grow like them, and the desire of knowledge and of song is dead in you. Ah, you shrink, Orpheus ; but I promise you this, along that road lies happiness, a quiet mind, and length of days. Will you not follow it, dear child ? ”

“ Tell me of the other road,” answered Orpheus.

“ If you choose it,” went on Calliope in a sadder tone, “ it will indeed lead you to your heart’s desire, but though it looks all sunshine to you now, you must pass through a dark, chill valley to your journey’s end. It is the way of knowledge, and where knowledge is there must sorrow be also. Think awhile which you will choose. You may live peaceful and contented on your own loved hillside, a simple woodman, like your father before you, until death takes you gently at last in a green old age. Or, by our aid, you may become a greater minstrel than the world has ever seen, and win yourself an unfading crown—yet it shall be bought with your tears and you shall wear it on earth but a brief while.”

“ I have chosen,” cried Orpheus eagerly ; “ do

not chide me for haste, wisest Lady, for were I to think a whole year I know I should choose at any cost to be the greatest minstrel in the world. There is only one thing," he added doubtfully, "if I choose that, may I still go home to my father? Because, if I may not, I must give it up. I could not bear to leave him all alone, grieving and thinking I have come to harm."

"Fear not for that," said Calliope, "you shall be with him by next noontide, only we lay this charge upon you, that you tell him neither where you have been nor with whom you have spoken. He will not question you, for a messenger has set his mind at rest about your absence."

Then Orpheus said again that he had made his choice to become a minstrel, and at that the other Sisters smiled on him more sweetly than ever; but he heard Calliope sigh.

Yet she said no word more, then or after, against his choice, for it is the way of Immortals when they offer their gifts to men to warn them once, and once only, what may come of taking those gifts. So, in another moment, she too gave him a radiant smile, and it was even blithely that she spoke to one of her sisters. "Thalia," she said, "this is our fosterling and pupil hence-

forward. How shall we begin to teach him the things a minstrel must know?"

Thalia answered only with a laugh, but she beckoned Orpheus to her side. He thought that amongst these lovely ladies she was the loveliest, with her mirthful face and black eyes, whose side-long glance seemed half-mocking, half-caressing. She shook her head as he stood looking at her, kissed him on his curls and laughed again. "No, no," she said, "you will not think me the fairest by and by. Calliope asks me what we shall teach you first. Now I love laughter so well that I would fain teach you to be merry and put away grave thoughts, but I read in your face that you will never be servant of mine. I think," she added, turning to another of the Nine, "that you, Melpomene, should know better than I what lessons befit this demure young scholar."

"My lessons," answered Melpomene in slow, deep tones, "are not for a child to learn." Orpheus looked at the speaker with surprise, for he saw that while all the sisters were much alike in form and countenance, she resembled Thalia so singularly that these two seemed to be twins. Only Melpomene's face was the saddest he had ever seen, and in her eyes, black like Thalia's, dwelt a sombre fire. He now noticed also that these two

carried each a waxen mask slung by a ribbon from her girdle, not of the grotesque sort he had seen mummers wear at vintage-time, but delicately moulded in the semblance of a woman's face. You would have said that Thalia's mask was the portrait of herself, and the other of Melpomene, if her calm visage could ever be touched with mortal anguish.

Then spoke a lady who held in one hand a wreath of golden olive-leaves and in the other a bough of laurel. "Come hither, Orpheus," she said, "and you, sisters, listen to me, who am the eldest among you. In the years to come, each one of us will give this boy somewhat of the lore that is her own, but while he is yet a child let us all unite to store his mind with the knowledge of marvellous and pleasant tales. For not without reason do men delight to honour the singer, from whom they learn the wondrous ways of the Immortals, and high deeds done in the ancient ages, that but for the power of song must perish from remembrance."

"Begin, then, Clio," answered Calliope ; "there are yet some hours to sunrise, when Orpheus must leave us for a while. Let him hear first some tale from you, who are mistress and queen of all bards that rehearse the glories of gods and men.

Afterwards, on the night of every full moon, he shall meet us here, until each of us in turn has told him a story. So shall he learn much that the folk he dwells among will be fain to hear of, when he sings to them again."

"Be it as you will, sister," said Clio, "but let me first ask him of what he most desires to hear, for you know that we can each tell best the story that pleases us most."

She paused and turned her shining, expectant gaze on Orpheus.

"I think," he said timidly, "I should like most of all to hear how the world began."

"That," said Clio, "is a story Urania can best tell you," and taking him by the hand, she placed him at the feet of a fair-haired sister who sat a little apart, lost in thought, with eyes fixed upon the sky. Urania wore a sapphire-coloured mantle flowing from her shoulders inwrought with silver stars, and there were stars also—but these seemed to be real stars—twinkling among the violets that bound her hair. Her eyes were bluer than the mantle and brighter than the stars; her face was neither mournful nor joyous, but calm and cold like the face of a marble statue. Orpheus no sooner looked on it than he thought, "This is the queen of them all, and the fairest," and he

wondered suddenly if those beautiful lips never smiled. Urania seemed to read his thought.

"Some day," she said to him in a voice of heavenly sweetness, "some day you will sing me the song I wait for, the perfect song, and then you will see me smile. But to-night it is yours to hear and mine to speak; listen now to the story of how the world began."

And thus she told the tale.

ONCE there was no sun, no moon or stars, no mountains, seas, or rivers, no bright company of immortal gods—none of the things that seem as if they had been always there, except one thing. That was Earth. But even Earth had not always been. There is an Eternal Spirit without beginning and without end, who is called by many names, but his oldest name is Eros—that is, Love—and he, before Time began, created Earth out of Chaos. Do not ask me what Chaos is, for it is not anything; just think what there is in an empty hole. Emptiness? Yes, and that is another name for Nothingness; so it was that men of old called it Chaos, which means a Gap. If you could get outside the World, which is made up of All the Things there Are, you would find yourself in Chaos. Now Earth is alive and of all else that lives she is the Mother. For

Earth thinks, even as you and I think, only in a much more wonderful way ; her thoughts are not just thoughts, they are real things. First of all, because she wanted a roof over her to shut out Chaos, she thought of a great dome of sapphire—and there was the Sky, that glorious Being whose myriad eyes are the stars. Then she thought of a circle of silver for the lower edge of the Sky to rest on—and there was the round Ocean that girdles her about ! All the lovely and all the terrible things in this world around us are the thoughts of Earth ; from the snowy peaks of mighty hills to the tiniest flowers in the crannies of their rocks ; from the sun in heaven to the skylark that mounts singing in his rays ; from the eagle and the tiger to the dove and the lamb.

But at first Earth would not bring to birth the thoughts that were struggling within her, because the Sky would lean ever and anon upon her bosom that he might slumber there, and his weight stifled each newborn thing. Then she thought of mighty sons who would rid their Mother of that vast oppressor, and there came forth from her the Giant brethren called the Titans. But though they were huge as mountains they could not push back the Sky when he lowered himself upon them, and they hid from him in

Earth's underground caves. Now, the youngest Titan, whose name was Cronos, was the least in stature and in strength, but he was wise and cunning above the rest. He said to Earth, "Mother, we cannot lift up the Sky, but have you never a weapon to give me that I may pierce him through while he lies sleeping?" "Son," said Earth, "what would you do? Bethink you that if you slay him the dead Sky will cover us for ever like a stone laid upon a grave which none can roll away?"

"I am not minded to slay him," said Cronos, "but had I some sharp thing in my hand I would so use it that in pain and fear he should rise up to his own place and there abide."

Then Earth gave her son a curved flint keen as a razor's edge, and when next the Sky descended upon her Cronos thrust it forth into the darkness that brooded above the cavern where he hid. A great shudder of anguish shook the Sky as the sharp stone pierced his azure substance, and his thousand eyes unclosed, flashing blood-red light. Trembling, he rose up from Earth's broad bosom and never more forsook his post on high. Age after age he keeps silent watch there, and countless generations of men have beheld those bright, patient eyes of his gazing down all night long on

the green lap of Earth, where he fain would rest once more.

But when Earth was freed from the Sky's embrace and ample room was hers again, she sent forth the Sun to rule the day and the Moon to rule the night, and the mountains and valleys appeared, and the seas and lakes and rivers, and every tree and plant that grows, and all the tribes of beasts and birds and fishes. And Cronos was lord of this new world, for his brethren feared him and did him reverence when they saw he had vanquished the Sky. So he set his throne upon the blue vault of heaven and reigned over all. Besides the Titans, he had for vassals all those Powers unseen which are everywhere around us—children and ministers of Earth ; from that light-giving God, Helios by name, who guides the flaming chariot of the Sun and the mighty spirit of Ocean, to the gentle Nymphs of the crystal springs and prattling mountain brooks. He had dominion also over the Winds, the bringers of rain and hail and tempest, and suffered them not to visit land or sea with violence, and he shut fast the treasures of the snow in the utmost North. Thus it was that in his reign Earth knew not storm or cold, and her flowers bloomed all the year, nurtured by the sun and showers of a

perpetual Spring. Then, too, the beasts of field and forest were at peace with one another and kind preyed not upon kind; the lion grazed beside the lamb, and the serpent was harmless as the dove. This was that happy Golden Age of which the poets sing.

Into such a world came the latest born of Earth's children, even Man. Yes, gods and men are of one race, sprung from one Mother, though the ways appointed them to walk in be as far asunder as the East is from the West; and the first men, the men of the Golden Age, were like in strength and beauty to their divine kindred. They knew not sickness, pain, or sorrow, but dwelt at ease, reaping without labour the fruits that Earth brought forth for them abundantly; innocent and pure in heart, they lifted up pious hands in praise and prayer to the gods, and there was among them no need of king or lawgiver or warrior, for they lived as one family, knowing nought of envy and strife. Immortal they were not, but their serene life was prolonged a thousand years in perfect vigour, and when it ended they fell peacefully asleep. After their death it was granted them to become guardian spirits in middle air, and these are they who evermore keep watch over the righteous. Now, of this blessed race

none were women, so they left no children to come after them. Cronos had been well pleased with the sinless folk, and he bade Earth bring forth a second race like unto the first, who should likewise tend the fair garden of the World and offer the fruits thereof upon his altars. But Earth answered and said, "Son, that may not be. There is a law which all things living must obey, and myself also, and by that law whatsoever has life must grow up to its appointed prime, but after that must wither and decay. The thousand years you have reigned have been the bloom-time of the world ; henceforward shall begin a change and all things alter for the worse. So must it be with the generations of men ; each will be weaker, more evil, and more short-lived than the last, and better were it that no more of them should see the light. Ask me not to bring forth a second race, for they will be far unlike the first, because the Golden Age is even now passing and the Age of Silver is at hand."

Nevertheless, Cronos did not heed the words of his Mother, but importuned her until she was weary of his asking and brought forth a second race. Now they came forth from the ground as little children, like the first race, and seemed no less fair and strong, but behold, they were so

slow of growth that they remained children for a hundred years. Meantime, all things were as they had been from the beginning, and when Cronos saw that the children were lusty and beautiful, and played happily together in the garden of the World, he laughed in his heart and said to himself, "Surely my mother deceived me, and there shall no change befall my kingdom. This second race will be even better than the first, for their lives will be ten times longer, seeing their childhood lasts a hundred years." Moreover, the sight of them put it into his mind to desire children of his own. So he said to Earth, "Mother, you have never rewarded me with a gift for delivering you from the Sky, your oppressor."

"Is it not enough," answered Earth, "that you are become king over him and over all the World?"

"Nay," said Cronos, "that I did by my own strength. But I would have a free gift of you to boot in token that you are not unmindful of your son's good service."

"I will give you what you will," said his Mother.

Straightway Cronos asked her to bring forth a wife for him that he might have children of his

own to delight his heart. Then Earth, because she had promised, granted him that boon, but she prophesied to him, bidding him beware of his children, for one of them should drive him from his heavenly throne and rule the world in his stead. When Cronos heard this he was troubled; nevertheless he took the wife Earth gave him, who for beauty and majesty appeared meet to be his queen, having devised in his crafty mind a way to defeat that prophecy.

But his wife, whose name was Rhea, had heard the words of Earth, and her mother-love made her more cunning than he. She guessed what he would do, and as soon as her first babe was born she hid it, and put a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes into its cradle. Cronos knew that his children would be immortal, like himself, therefore he sought not to slay the babe, but coming secretly to the cradle he took it, as he thought, and cast it into a pit of darkness under the earth, where it should be prisoned eternally. Then the wise Rhea came to him making great lamentation because the babe was gone from the cradle, and he smiled grimly but answered her never a word. Thus she deceived him, and not once only, for she had three sons and three daughters, and she saved them all after this manner, hiding them from him

in mountain caves and in thick shades of untrodden woods.

In the meanwhile the hundred years of the childhood of the second race, the men of the Silver Age, passed by. So soon as they were come to manhood, Earth's warning began to be fulfilled. Beautiful they were to look upon, and their strength was as the strength of giants, but in all else they were as different from the first race as darkness from light. For they were proud, lawless, treacherous, covetous, delighting in violence, full of envy, malice, and guile.

Each did that which was right in his own eyes without fear of the gods or regard for his fellows, and whoso was stronger among them oppressed the weaker, taking by force whatsoever he desired. Thus they lived in perpetual strife, and though they were men they were in their wrath even as wicked children, carried away by blind rage at every thwarting of their will, so that they would fall on one another with teeth and nails, and with such weapons as they had, which were clubs and jagged stones. Nor was it long before Earth was stained for the first time with man's blood, for this evil race thought it as light a thing to take a brother's life as cruel boys think it to kill a sparrow. But the blood they shed cried against

them from the ground ; the Sun-god turned his chariot aside from his appointed path that he might not look upon it, and Earth herself quaked and sickened at the touch of it.

From the hour of the first murder, change and decay began to creep over the world ; its everlasting summer now waned into autumn ; autumn passed all too quickly ; soon men, beasts, and birds for the first time felt the icy grip of winter and the gnawing of hunger as their food of fruits and herbage failed them. Then it was that the lion took on fierceness and the fox cunning, and beasts began to make prey of each other ; then from the blood-polluted earth arose pestilential fogs, laden with the seeds of all diseases that plague men and cattle, all blights and mildews that lay waste the fruitful fields.

Cronos looked down from the sky, and behold the world, his pleasant garden, was become a gloomy wilderness, and his anger was kindled against the men of the second race, for he said, "Because they have despised my altars, and the altars of my Mother, and have defiled them with blood of the slain, she is mourning, sick at heart, and all things mourn with her." And he cried to Earth to open and swallow up that race of sinners, but she was sleeping for sorrow, and

heard him not. Then he opened the doors of the treasury of the snow, high up in the northern sky, where the Pole Star is set for a lamp above the portal, and the white whirling flakes fell ever thicker and faster, until they shrouded the sleeping Earth as it were with a gleaming pall. "A silver winding-sheet," said Cronos, "for this race that is named of silver, though in truth they are dross of the vilest." A winding-sheet it proved to them indeed, who were born and bred in a sunny clime and knew not the use of fire, nor clothing, nor any of the arts by which men make shift to live in colder regions. Too bemused with cold and fear to seek shelter, they stared dumbly at the white feathers falling, falling out of a livid sky, drifting, drifting softly over and around them, and in that stupor their dark souls passed, not into air, but to shades of underground. So perished the second race, but when Cronos would have bound their spirits with fiery chains in the Under-world, Earth withstood him, saying, "These knew not the evil that they did, being without law or teachers. Torment them not, but let such punishment await the races yet to come, the men of Bronze and of Iron, whose crimes will be done against law and against knowledge of the right." So he let them alone, to dwell among

the Nether Powers of Earth, and in the after-time they became avenging spirits, issuing forth by night to haunt the evildoer and the shedder of blood.

But for a long while there were no men in the land of the living, and many tribes of beasts perished likewise in the great snowstorm of Cronos, whose huge bones are seen unto this day in caverns where they betook themselves for refuge. Slowly, very slowly, Earth roused herself from her sleep of grief, and shook off the pall of snow and ice, so slowly in truth that it clings to her still in the uttermost solitudes of the north, where the wondering traveller may yet behold the Winter of the Silver Age. At last Spring came upon the world not brief as ours, yet soon to pass, for the march of the Four Seasons was begun, and only in a few favoured lands could Summer henceforth reign perpetual, as in the Golden Age. Once more Earth clothed herself with verdure, and a thousand thousand flowers peeped forth from their long slumber in her bosom; once more beast and bird were gladdened by the sun. Would you know why all living creatures did not perish of cold and hunger when Cronos buried the world in snow? It was because Rhea had compassion on them, and opened to them those secret places of the hills in

which she had hidden her children. There, in pillared caverns winding far underground, where sunless rivers ran, and roofs of spar threw back the weird lustre that springs from Earth's central fires, the goddess-mother fed the wild things with her children's food, even that heavenly bread which immortals name ambrosia. For every night while Cronos slept she visited her babes by stealth, bringing them ambrosia in a covered basket of golden wickerwork which Earth gave her for a marriage gift, and the virtue of the basket was that it never grew empty. So long as the creatures ate the food of the gods they could ail nothing, nor grow old, and by the gentle majesty of Rhea the shyest and the fiercest alike were tamed, and became her babies' playmates.

But when she saw that the world was beginning anew and how fair the woods and pastures lay in the sunlight, she sent them all forth that they might live at liberty after their kind ; all save two lions who would not leave her, and these ever after have drawn the chariot wherein she rides by night upon the mountains.

After all these things had come to pass, Cronos reigned yet awhile in peace, trusting that his kingdom should endure for ever since his children were fast in prison ; but for all that he was ill at

ease, for he was aware of change without and within him, and could feel that the prime of his own strength had departed with the fading of Earth's golden dawn.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF ZEUS

WHEN Urania made an end of her story there was silence for a little space. Then Orpheus, with an eager, questioning look, turned to Calliope, but forebore to speak. "What is it you would ask, child?" said she.

"I would ask," he said, "how Earth's prophecy to Cronos was fulfilled? I think it must have come true, for I have never heard of any King of the Sky but almighty Zeus. Was it Zeus, then, who overthrew Cronos at last? And was Zeus one of those children whom Rhea hid from their cruel father?"

"Child," answered Calliope, "beware of rash words when you speak of the Immortals, and tax them not lightly with cruelty or wrong, for their ways are not as man's ways, nor their thoughts as man's thoughts. As for the downfall of Cronos, it came to pass indeed according to Earth's saying,

and you shall hear the tale—but not now. See, dawn is here already, and you must be gone.”

So saying, she rose up, and her sisters also. “Farewell,” they said to him, “farewell, our Orpheus, till the next moon is at the full,” and waving their hands to him with a gracious gesture of parting they glided away among the trees.

Only Calliope lingered, and taking the boy’s hand, led him to a small round pool, so thickly fringed with maidenhair and white poppies that he had not yet seen it, though it lay hard by the well.

“You have tasted,” she said, “the Water of Memory ; this, which rises so near it, is the Water of Forgetfulness, which we should have given you to drink had you not chosen to become a minstrel. Look, as I dip this myrtle-branch into it, how it grows clouded as it were mingled with milk. This branch you must take home, and cast it into the spring near your hut, where all the woodcutters are wont to come for water, and you shall soon find that not one of them remembers your song of yesterday. And now, little one, you must hie on your way ; fear not to miss it, for here is a guide that will lead you straight as crow can fly.”

Even as she spoke a dusky ring-dove fluttered down from the oak above them and lighted at

Orpheus's feet. He stooped to stroke its glossy neck, but forthwith it spread its wings and flew slowly down one of the green aisles that opened on the glade. "Follow the bird of peace," said Calliope, and with a last kiss she turned and was gone.

Orpheus went forward along the path the dove had taken, guided sometimes by the sight of its hovering wings, and sometimes by its soft cooing from the over-arching boughs. There was a strange lightness in his feet, as though they, too, were winged, and it seemed to him almost that he could feel feathery pinions brush his ankles as he sped along. Here and there his way was carpeted with wild strawberries, which his bright-eyed guide would alight among, pecking daintily at their scarlet fruit, while the child feasted also, and thought he had never found berries so large or so sweet before. How far he thus journeyed through the forest mazes he could not guess, but the sun was high in heaven when he saw before him blue smoke curling upwards through the trees, and, running forwards, found himself in the little clearing where stood his father's hut. The dove he could no longer see; he called softly, "Thanks, thanks, dear bird," and heard a far-off coo that seemed to answer "Farewell."

Mindful of Calliope's bidding, he went first to the spring hard by, and cast in the sprig of myrtle, to whose leaves the Water of Forgetfulness still clung like drops of milky dew. As he turned towards the hut his father came from the doorway with a pitcher in his hand. "Welcome, little son," he said, "I heard you would be home at noontide, and left my work to make ready a meal for you. Come in and eat; but first fill me this pitcher, for I am thirsty. Orpheus filled the pitcher, and when his father had drunk a long draught they went into the hut and sat down to eat. And, even as Calliope foretold, Oiagros asked his son never a word about his absence; moreover, it was plain from his talk that he had no memory of what had befallen the day before. Was it only by lucky chance, Orpheus wondered, that his father had tasted of the enchanted water in the very moment of their meeting?

He was afraid to say anything that might betray the secret the fairy Ladies had bidden him keep; but he longed to know what the message was they had sent to his father, and who had carried it. So, when the meal was finished, and Oiagros, taking up his billhook, was going forth to work again, Orpheus said, "You did not tell

me, father, who brought you word that I should come home at noon."

"Little truant," said Oiagros, pausing on the threshold, "did you think the shepherd-lad would forget your message?" Then, seeing the child's bewildered look, he added, laughing, "'Twas well his wits did not go a-woolgathering like a certain bairn's I could tell of, who was found straying leagues away in the mountain pastures, and has forgotten already how he sent me word he was safe housed for the night in a shepherd's cot! Ay, ay! jolly folk are the shepherds, and I warrant they made you such mirth with their tales and jests that you thought no more of your poor father. But when you came not home from play at nightfall, I was glad enough to see that same blithe-faced lad; he was bound, he said, for a sheepcote in the valley, so he stayed but a moment, to give me news of you."

"I do not believe he was a real shepherd," murmured Orpheus when he was left alone. But not till long afterwards did he learn that the unknown visitant was Hermes, the Messenger of the Immortals, who in this guise had done the errand of the Nine Sisters.

Now, for some days Orpheus shunned to meet the woodmen and their children, for, in spite of

the marvels he had seen, he could not rid himself of a fear that they would remember what had passed when they last saw him. So soon, however, as he encountered them again, he knew that they also had drunk forgetfulness in the water of the spring, for they greeted him with all their wonted friendliness. Very slowly now the time went by, while he watched nightly the waning of the moon; endless seemed the interval while her silver lamp was darkened and only the chill light of stars glimmered above the sleeping forest; but at last her crescent, like a pearly boat, breasted once more the purple flood of the twilight, and then the child could feel he had not long to wait for the promised night when he should hear another wonder-tale.

In his faith that the Nine Sisters would keep tryst with him, he was content to leave all to them, and did not seek to find his way again to their enchanted Well; but when the longed-for night was come, and they had made no sign, he stole from his sleeping father's side and sat disconsolate on the moonlit lawn before their door. There, though he had come out broad awake, he fell suddenly asleep, and once again the trill of a nightingale mingled with his dreams. This time, however, it came blended with a soft whirring of

wings, and Orpheus had the sense of being borne swiftly through the air on a feathery cloud. And this time it was without wonderment that he awoke to find himself in the midst of the Nine, beside the Well of Memory. They greeted him only with their eyes, and Calliope, as though but an hour had passed since he listened to Urania's tale, said straightway, "Who will tell Orpheus the story he waits to hear, of Cronos's downfall and the triumph of Zeus?"

"Let our sister of the olive-crown tell it," said Thalia, "for victory and triumph are ever the theme of her songs."

Clio smiled, and began to speak as follows, waving the laurel-bough she held in time to the rhythmic rise and fall of her deep melodious voice :—

WHILE Earth lay buried in the snow that overwhelmed the men of the Silver Age, the children of Cronos dwelt deep within her hollow bosom and had never beheld as yet the light of day. But when they saw the beasts and birds—their playmates—hastening forth from that dim place of sanctuary to the free light and air of heaven, they pleaded with their goddess-mother to let them also mount into the upper world. Rhea consented, and led them up by winding rocky

ways into a vast grotto, whose outer portal opened on a lonely mountain-top. The children looked down from that eyrie on the fair world spreading far below, and up to the sky's crystal vault, and clapped their hands for joy, beseeching their mother that they might no more dwell in the sunless depths. Now, she had no heart to deny them, but she bethought her that their laughter and shouts at play might reach the ears of Cronos in the sky, if they remained together, and then he would seize them all. She resolved therefore to hide each child apart, so that if by ill-hap Cronos found one, she might yet save the others. And she carried them one by one to distant lands, East and West and North and South, some to mountain glens, and some to the inmost recesses of untrodden woods, where they grew up solitary, tended by such guardians as she could find for them. But her youngest and best-beloved son, who was named Zeus, the Goddess left in the mountain cave, and gave him for nurses a troop of Oreads, those shy, fleet nymphs of the hills; and she summoned the shaggy goat-foot Satyrs from the woodlands to keep watch around his cradle, that if he cried they might drown the sound with the rough music of their cymbals.

After this Rhea durst visit her children no more, for as Cronos brooded darkly on things to come, it crossed his mind that his wife was too often absent from their sky-palace of late, and he began to watch her narrowly, lest peradventure she were plotting a mischief against him. He dreamed not of the trick played on him whereby he had cast stones into the pit of darkness in mistake for his children; but now, vexed with nameless doubts and fears, he thought, "What if she guesses that it was I who stole the babes from their cradles, and is seeking some revenge? I must bestir myself; I will go down and walk to and fro upon the earth, that if any treachery be afoot I may spy it out."

So mighty Cronos walked to and fro upon the earth, striding over the highest hills and wading the deepest seas, such was his giant stature. And he could see nothing amiss; only he marked that the stone altars which the men of the Golden Age had set up to him in groves and in high places were broken down, and there were none to build them up or offer him sacrifice, whereat he was grieved in his heart. Then he sought out one of his Titan brethren, Prometheus by name, who dwelt in the country called Arcadia, and said to him, "Prometheus, I know that you are

favoured above all her sons by Earth, our Mother, who has bestowed on you gifts that we others lack, even eyes that can discern the future, and hands that can mould living creatures out of the formless dust. Come, now, grant me a boon. Make me men to inhabit this world I am lord over, for there are none left to offer me the sacrifices I love and praise my name when I send them sweet rain in Spring."

This he said, knowing full well that Earth herself would not be persuaded a second time to grant that boon.

"Know you not," answered Prometheus, "that these new men will be weaker and worse by nature than those who have gone before?"

"If they are weaker," said Cronos, "they will have the more need to put their trust in my power and call on me for aid. If they are impious and stubborn, I shall destroy them as I did the second race; but being more feeble they may also be of milder mood."

"Whilst you are yet king of all, my brother," said Prometheus, "I must do your pleasure." So Cronos left him, and went his way.

That night Prometheus went down into a deep glen of Arcadia, where flowed a river, and he took red clay of the river bank and tempered it

with water, and made men for Cronos of it. All night he wrought, and at sunrise he breathed into them the breath of life, and they lived and moved. But before they came fully to their senses he departed from them, and they neither knew, nor cared to know, who had made them, any more than babes newborn. These men of clay were, to look upon, like the tallest and fairest of the race who now inhabit the earth (for Prometheus made them full-grown), but they could not compare in stature, strength, or comeliness, with the races of the Gold and the Silver Ages. At first they dwelt in the woods and caves of Arcadia, and all the food they had was acorns and wild berries. Cronos was well pleased with them because they were a peaceable folk, and because when they found his ruined altars they builded them again and offered the choicest fruits they could find to the god of the bright sky above them, though he was not known to them by any name.

And there was still no woman in the world, for the thought of making one had not come to any of the Immortals hitherto.

But now Earth saw that the hour she had foretold was at hand, for the young Zeus was grown to his full strength. She sent her deep-murmuring voice up to him in his mountain grot,

bidding him descend and hearken to her counsel. Nothing loth, he obeyed, and in echoing chambers beneath the ocean floor heard her solemn tones, as it were the muffled booming of the surges overhead, revealing things to come, and all the means whereby he should achieve the victory in store for him. Then, at her behest, he journeyed on and on, under the Midland Sea, through endless corridors whose rocky walls shone thick with diamond sparks, through vaults of snowy quartz where veins of gold branched roofwards like avenues of giant ferns, until he came at last to the Forge of the Cyclopes, in the roots of an island mountain that is called Etna. Now the Cyclopes are Earth-born smiths, swart and grim of aspect, having each a single eye set in the midst of his forehead. The peak of Etna glitters with eternal snow, but in its hollow base is a burning fiery furnace, whence fountains of flame and torrents of molten rock spout forth at times on the mountain-top to the terror of mortals. Beside this furnace the Cyclopes toiled, smelting iron from the ore and forging it upon their anvils. This task was set them by Cronos, and he it was who had shut them up in that nether dungeon ; for while they yet dwelt at liberty on the slopes of Etna, he saw their skill in the craft of smiths,

and made slaves of them that all their handiwork might be his alone.

The Cyclopes stared in dumb surprise at the young god as he stood before them, but when they heard the errand he was come upon they were glad, and hasted to do his bidding. For Earth had revealed to him the secret virtue of the stone called brimstone, and how the Cyclopes might forge it into weapons wherewith he should prevail against Cronos. So when Zeus had shown them the pale yellow stone that lay unregarded in many a smoky recess of their cavern, they cast some of it into the furnace, drew it forth in white-hot glowing masses, and laid it on the anvils. Then he bade them temper it with water that Earth had given him in a golden cup—ice-cold water of enchantment from a fount of the Underworld—and fashion it with hammer-strokes into the form of blunt-headed javelins. This the Cyclopes no sooner did than light more dazzling than the noonday sun burst forth from those javelins in arrowy flashes, and a tremendous clap of sound, as it were the rending asunder of the mountain, reverberated through the cavern. No eye had seen such intolerable radiance, no ear heard the like of that shattering peal, for this was the birth of lightning and of thunder, which as

yet were unknown in earth or heaven. Until that day, snow and hail, storm and tempest, furnished forth the armoury of the sky—weapons so terrible that Cronos, wielding them, might well deem himself invincible. But he was soon to learn that the new-forged thunderbolts were more terrible still.

Thus armed by the Cyclopes, Zeus went forth to seek his two elder brothers in their hiding-places, and bid them aid him to overthrow the tyranny of Cronos. Poseidon, the eldest-born, he found far South, in the wilds of Libya, where herds of dun horses roamed the boundless plains ; him a gentle mare had nourished with her milk, and he had grown up a lover and tamer of steeds. But Pluto, the second brother, he found dwelling on the misty coasts of the West, beside the gates of Ocean ; for there he had been reared by the Sisters Three, who spin the threads of fate for mortals and immortals.

Then the three brethren went in company to the Northern lands, where Mount Olympus towers up into the sky, and having scaled his cloudy summit, they made it their citadel, and the store-house of the new thunder ; wherefore Zeus and all his kin have the name of Olympians unto this day.

“And now there was war in heaven ; Cronos, when he saw what was done, called to his aid the Titans, his brothers, and they fought against the young invaders. But vain was their giant strength against the flaming bolts hurled from Olympus ; one by one they felt the lightning sear, though it could not consume, their immortal frames, and smitten deep on heart or brow, fell headlong from the crystal ramparts of the sky. Cronos alone was unscathed by his son’s thunder—since Zeus was warned of Earth to spare him, lest he should provoke a father’s curse—and seeing all was lost he forsook his ancient throne and fled for refuge into the country called by men Italy, but by the gods, Hesperia. With him went Rhea, her heart touched with compassion for her stern lord’s fall, and choosing, in her faithfulness, rather to share his exile than the triumph of her children. Sadly they took their way within the passes of the Apennines, and there, in a deep glen, where chestnut boughs shut out the sight of his lost sky, Cronos sat forlorn, his hoary head sunk upon his breast.

But Rhea went in search of the vanquished Titans, who lay, groaning with pain and rage, on desert shores or under craggy precipices, and persuaded them to return with her to their fallen



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THE DOWNFALL OF THE TITANS

From the painting by RUBENS



king and hold council together in this evil plight.

Now Prometheus, knowing what must betide, had not obeyed the call of Cronos to battle, and he restrained also his twin-brother, Epimetheus. These two Rhea found in Arcadia, and at her entreaty they came to Cronus with the rest. Then spoke fierce Enceladus, the hugest of the Titans: "Shall we, Earth's first-born, tamely endure the yoke of this upstart Zeus, this puny rebel that has not half the stature of the least among us? Could I but come to grips with him I would break him like a reed! Up, Titans, while now these robber gods are revelling at their ease in the sky mansions, let us rush in upon them and seize that new, strange fire wherewith they overcame us."

But his brethren sat motionless and silent, for they dreaded to approach the terrible unknown fire that had printed burning scars on their once haughty brows. Rhea saw the thought in their gloomy eyes, and before Enceladus could speak further, "Prometheus!" she cried, "have you no word of counsel? Is there nothing in the wide world that can resist the force of those flaming shafts of Zeus?"

"There is one thing," answered Prometheus,

“yet to know what it is can avail you nothing. For it is not Zeus who has conquered us, but everlasting Fate. Against that Power the mightiest strive in vain ; it setteth up one and pulleth down another. Be patient, brethren, and cease to meditate revenge ; as Cronos has had his appointed reign, so also must Zeus, until a stronger than he shall overcome him at the last.”

Heedless of his prophetic words, the Titans urged him to reveal what was that one thing which could resist the lightning. And he told them it was a certain herb that grew in one spot only of the whole earth, and had such virtue that whatever was anointed with its milk-white juice was proof against both lightning-flash and thunderstone. He told them also the appearance of the herb, but where it grew he would not say.

Then the Titans with one consent rose up, bidding Cronos await them in the glen, and went divers ways over the earth, seeking diligently for the herb. But Prometheus, when he saw that they would not hearken to his counsel, departed likewise, and went up to the mansions of the sky, bearing an olive-branch in sign that he came peaceably, and he told Zeus of the herb, and how the Titans were gone in quest of it.

“For these tidings,” said Zeus, “I am beholden

to you evermore. Easily, if they found that herb, would the Titans defy the worst that I could do. Now tell me where I may find it growing."

"In a cleft of the rocks," replied Prometheus, "where an eagle has built her eyrie, on the highest peak of Caucasus."

Now it was the dawn of day when he came to Zeus. Straightway the new Lord of the Sky commanded the Sun to turn back from his course, and the Moon and Stars to veil their light, and he covered the firmament with densest cloud. So the whole world lay in darkness for three days and nights, and the Titans groped their way as best they might, tearing up pine-trees by the roots to serve them for torches. But meanwhile Zeus descended to the peak of Caucasus, and when he had plucked up the herb he swallowed it. Thus its virtue passed into him, and this is why he alone of the Immortals fears not the power of lightning.

After this the world had quiet for a space, for when the Titans heard what was become of the herb, they durst not make war again, but hid themselves in waste places of the earth, biding their time. Then Zeus divided his new realm with his brethren; the sky he kept for himself; the rivers, lakes, and seas he gave to

Poseidon, and Pluto he made king over the Underworld.

As for Prometheus, he would have given him for reward the Happy Isles, that lie near the Gates of Sunset, far in the Western main, and are called Elysium in the speech of the gods. But Prometheus said that he desired nothing for himself; the only boon he would ask was that the Happy Isles might be given to Cronos and to Rhea. This Zeus granted, for the love he had to his mother, and forthwith Prometheus led the dis-crowned pair to that blessed land. There they dwell at peace in the fadeless Elysian bowers, where winter never comes, nor great winds rave, but ever soft ocean airs blow through groves of frankincense, and over orchard lawns that keep their wealth of bloom and fruitage all the year. And they see no more the light of the sun, for a light that is not of earth, golden, calm, eternal, bathes the Happy Isles in diviner day.

CHAPTER IV

PROMETHEUS THE FIREBRINGER

WHILE Clio told her tale the eastern sky paled into hues of grey and amethyst, and the woods lay hushed in a deeper than midnight stillness, as if they held their breath, expecting the daily miracle of the sunrise. It came even as she ceased, brimming the hollow of heaven with rosy gold, and at once, as though a charm were broken, the forest seemed alive with the rustle of leaves, the fluttering of wings, and the sweet clamour of a thousand birds. Half dazed by the sudden flood of colour, light, and sound, Orpheus started to his feet; for a moment all things swam before him through a rainbow mist; he rubbed his eyes—and behold he was standing at his own threshold alone in the morning sunshine.

It needs not, after this, that I should tell how yet seven nights more the boy found himself among the Nine Sisters beside their moonlit well,

and seven times awoke, as from a dream, at sunrise ; for the manner of his coming and going was always the same. Only, when the months of winter came it was in his little pallet-bed that he fell asleep and woke again, and nothing about his visits to the Nine seemed to him so wonderful as this, that their bird-haunted glade kept all its warmth and bloom while the forest around lay deep in snow. The very moon that elsewhere sparkled keen with frost athwart leafless boughs here still beamed soft and golden on trees and flowers that never bade the Spring farewell.

Now, when for the third time Orpheus must choose a tale to hear, he asked for the story of the men whom Prometheus made out of the river clay.

"In that story," said Calliope, "lies so much of sadness that our sister Melpomene may claim it for herself."

"Overmuch of sadness," said Melpomene, "to please childish ears."

"Nay, sister," answered Calliope, "to a child all is well that ends well, and in this tale the star of Hope shines brightest at the close. Come, speak to us of Prometheus and his love to mankind."

Melpomene bowed her head in token of consent, and spoke as follows :—

IN the beginning of the reign of Zeus, his bosom friend and counsellor was Prometheus, by whose wisdom he had balked the Titans of their revenge. But ere long the young King of the Sky became jealous of that very wisdom to which he owed so much, and fell to doubting the loyalty of his chief helper. He began to say to himself that as Prometheus had forsaken Cronos in his hour of need, so he would forsake Zeus, should he foresee the coming of some yet mightier god. Had he not, moreover, interceded for Cronos, and given him a sure refuge in those Happy Isles that lay beyond the range of lightning-flash or thunderstone—and was he not, perhaps, already conspiring with the exiled Titan brethren to restore their ancient king?

Now, what mainly bred suspicion in the mind of Zeus was this : Prometheus, though he came duly to council and to feast in the heavenly halls, seemed ever impatient to be gone upon some business of his own in the world below. It fell on a day that Zeus sat banqueting, throned in splendour such as mortal eye hath not seen, and surrounded by the glorious company of the Olympians, his brothers and sisters, and Prometheus rose up from his place and made to depart, after his wont. And Zeus asked him,

“What is it you will find on earth, Prometheus, fairer than this house of mine, that you are in such haste to leave?”

“Nothing fairer, nor so fair,” answered Prometheus, with a smile, “but something sweeter to me. For bethink you, King of us all, that you were born where now you reign, but I am no native of the Sky; to me, a son of Earth, the green glens of Arcadia are dearer than all your starry pomp.”

So he went his way, but Zeus sat frowning in his place, for the answer misliked him. Presently he called to him the blithe-faced Hermes, his herald and messenger, and bade him follow Prometheus and watch what he did in those glens that he loved better than the golden houses of heaven. “It is for no good end,” he said wrathfully, “that the Titan hides his doings from my view under the dense covert of his oak-woods.”

Straightway Hermes put on his shining, winged sandals that bear him over sea and land more swiftly than bird can fly, and sped upon his errand. When he came again, Zeus asked him what he had seen. “King of gods,” said Hermes, smiling, “have no fear that Prometheus will plot anything against us Olympians. He recks not of

us ; all his delight is in the race of puny mortals whom he made out of the clay to pleasure old Cronos ; and as for his business in Arcadia, it is neither more nor less than devising their welfare. He has taught them, it seems, to fashion rude tools and weapons of horn and bone and flint, to build themselves huts, to till and sow the ground, and many other arts that the men of the Gold and Silver Ages knew nothing of. I heard some among them speak of him—they call him the Great Brother whose wisdom helps to lighten their hard lot, and there was word also of a wondrous gift he has promised to bestow on them ere long.”

“What gift is that ? ” asked Zeus uneasily.

“They do not know,” answered Hermes ; “but Prometheus has told them that it will be to them *a good servant and a bad master.*”

Now Zeus was troubled at these tidings, for he did not believe that the great Titan would thus befriend mere mortals, creatures of a day, without some deep design. In time, perhaps, he would teach them so much that they would become wiser than gods—nay, this unknown gift he had promised them might be some potent charm that would make them strong enough to defy the Lord of the thunder ! Zeus pondered long what this gift

might be, but he could make no guess at it. So, when the Immortals were again gathered to the banquet, he put forth a riddle to them all, saying, "What is it that is *a good servant and a bad master?*" Some said one thing, some another; but Prometheus knew that Hermes had spied upon him in Arcadia, and whispered in his ear, "Minion of Zeus, if you would win favour with your master, say *It is fire.*" And Hermes said it, laughing, after his wont; for he himself never bore ill-will to any one, and dreamed not that a quarrel was toward between his lord and the Titan.

Zeus no sooner heard the answer of Hermes than he perceived that fire was indeed the gift Prometheus was minded to bestow upon men, which, as yet, was unknown to mortals, and burned only beneath the earth and on the sacred Hearth of the gods on high. He resolved to defeat the purpose of Prometheus, whatever it might be, and, rising up, he said, "You have heard, Olympians, my riddle and its answer. Now hear and obey my command. Let none dare to profane the thrice-holy element of fire by bestowing it on mortals, but be it for ever consecrate to the use of the gods alone. Swift vengeance will I take on him who shall transgress this my law."

The rest of the Immortals hastily promised obedience, but Prometheus began to plead earnestly with Zeus for the race of mortals, bidding him remember the want and hardship they must endure now that Earth no longer gave her increase freely as in the Age of Gold. Without fire, he said, mankind could not warm their shivering frames in the winter season, nor forge weapons of metal to defend themselves from beasts of prey, nor bring to perfection any of those helpful crafts that he had begun to teach them. "Forbid them fire," he cried, "and you forbid them all hope of rising above the life of animals; their doom is sure, they must be savages to the end."

But Zeus would not hearken to his pleading, for he could not see that the heart of Prometheus was filled with compassion and lovingkindness for helpless man, being indeed blinded by his jealous mistrust.

"What are this folk of clay to me?" he said disdainfully. "They were not made for my pleasure, that I should show them favour—nay, they belong to Cronos, who bade you provide him new worshippers when he had destroyed the race of Silver. For his sake they are hateful to me, and I have a mind to cut them off as he did those

others, and people Earth with a race that has known no other gods but me."

Prometheus made him no answer, but gave him a look at once proud and mournful, and in a little while he departed without word of farewell. And after that he came no more to the board of Zeus. But when some days had passed, Zeus looked forth upon the earth and saw pillars of blue smoke rising among the trees in all the valleys of Arcadia. For Prometheus had taken fire from the Hearth of the gods by stealth, and brought it to men in a hollow wand of fennel that served him instead of a staff. He had shown them how to make open hearths of sun-baked clay in their poor dwellings, and how to kindle dry wood thereon with the new gift, and they cried aloud for joy and wonder as they saw the scarlet flowers of flame blossom from the dead boughs.

Then was Zeus wroth indeed; in the first moment of his fury he stretched forth his hand to his thunderbolts with intent to hurl them upon the land of Arcadia and utterly consume every living thing therein. But he bethought him suddenly of a better way to wreak vengeance upon the rebel Prometheus, and he stayed his hand. Thunderbolts could not slay the Titan, since he was immortal, and to destroy the land and the



Anderson photo

HERMES

From the painting by RUBENS



men he loved would be but small satisfaction, for he could soon make himself another folk in some country fairer than Arcadia. "These men shall not die," said the angry god, "but I will devise such evils for them that they shall desire death rather than life, and Prometheus shall see their misery and be powerless to succour them. That shall be his keenest pang among the torments I will heap upon him."

Now there are two giant Twins whose lot it is to serve him that sits upon the throne of heaven, be he who he may, and the gods call them Kratos and Bia, that is to say, Might and Force. These Zeus called before him, and having laid certain commands on them, he sent them to the Forge of the Cyclopes in Mount Etna, which he had given to the lame smith-god, Hephæstus, the cunning craftsman of the Olympians, to be his workshop.

Meanwhile Prometheus, not ignorant of his doom, betook himself to the house of his brother, Epimetheus, and said to him, "Brother, I am bound on a far journey, and must bid farewell to you and to Arcadia, our pleasant home, for the Fates will have it so. Grieve not, nor be amazed at the things you will shortly hear concerning me, since all that must befall me I have foreseen with unshaken mind, but take good heed to yourself

and beware above all else of receiving any gift from Zeus."

With that he took leave of his brother, and returned to his own house, to await those whom he knew would come speedily, and that night he went unresisting with Kratos, Bia, and Hephæstus to his place of punishment.

There is a ravine of ice-clad rocks upon the peak of huge Mount Caucasus, so walled about with gaunt black precipices, so ghastly in its frozen desolation, that it might seem a very temple of Death, where nothing living had ever come since the making of the world. Not the tiniest, lowliest plant that grows peeps from the crannies of its jagged cliffs ; no voice of beast or bird ever echoes there, save the scream of a famished eagle far aloft. Yet it is a solitude without peace, for night and day fierce gusts sweep through the gorge, now wailing like spirits in torment, now with uproar so hideous that to hear it would drive a man from his wits. The bright snow that lies deep on the mountain head is whirled away by those pitiless blasts before it can mantle the unsightly masses of rock that bestrew the floor of the ravine or the lightning-scarred crags whence they have fallen.

Hither now came the captive Titan, led by the

ministers of Zeus. They had bound him with fetters of brass and with chains of iron, which Hephæstus had wrought, being so commanded, but sorely against his will. For he and all the Olympians loved Prometheus because of his great and gracious ways, and had they dared, would have interceded for him with their King. But Kratos and Bia, who were by nature without pity, exulted over their mighty prisoner, and when they were now come to the place Zeus had appointed and saw that Hephæstus stood gazing sorrowfully upon him, they were enraged. "Hephæstus!" cried Kratos fiercely, "why loiter you now? Have you a mind to take sides with this Fire-stealer, or have you so soon forgot the charge Zeus gave you by my mouth?"

"I would he had given it to some other," muttered the lame god.

"Have a care, Haltfoot, that he overhear you not," answered Kratos tauntingly. "It is well seen you are loth to do his bidding, and if you make not better speed your pity may shortly be needed for your own plight."

"Savage that you are," retorted Hephæstus, "what needs your rude urging? I know, and will perform the sentence of Zeus, but none that has not, like you, a heart of stone, could joy in

such a task. Come, let us about it, and hold your peace the while."

Forthwith Kratos and Bia caused Prometheus to stand upright against a huge pillar of rock, and they held up his arms above his head, while Hephæstus bound him to the pillar by the neck and wrists and ankles, riveting his fetters to the rock with nails of adamant. Slowly he plied his hammer, slowly he limped to and fro, and as he worked he heavily sighed. Meantime Kratos feasted his eyes on the sight, and exclaimed impatiently against his slackness. "Bind him faster, Hephæstus!" he cried. "Drive home this spike through the iron collar, that he may not turn his head to right or left! Look you, how loose sits this manacle! Another rivet, I pray you, lest the cunning rebel shake himself free. So—have you done at last? Ah, ha! Prometheus! could not all your foresight save you from this pass? Now learn, too late, what it is to be the Friend of Man and the Foe of Zeus!"

Never a word answered Prometheus, but Hephæstus angrily bade Kratos and Bia begone, for they had done their office. As they sullenly withdrew, he turned to the motionless figure against the pillar and spoke parting words.

"Son of Earth," he said, "not more unwelcome

are those bonds to you who wear them than was the forging of them to me. Alas ! that my skill is put to such a proof—that I must bind one of race divine in these shackles which no power can break ! Ah ! rash Prometheus, why did you flout the majesty of Zeus for the sake of worthless mortals ? Know you not that a newcomer makes ever a stern master, jealous of his honour ? Loth am I to leave you thus, but I can avail you nothing ; nor see I whence you are to look for any deliverer. Here, then, you must bide, shut out from sight and speech of gods or men by these eternal walls ; here, unsheltered in the scorching blaze of noon you will pray for the coming of starry-kirtled Night, albeit to you she brings no solace, but only exchange of torment—the arrows of frost for the arrows of the sun. Ay, where nought else ever changes, dear to your sleepless eyes shall be the comings of morn and eve.”

Having thus spoken, Hephæstus also went his way with halting steps, and all was silence for a space in that prison-house. Then a great cry broke from the Titan in his anguish, “ O Earth, Mother of all, O radiant Sky and free Winds of heaven, behold what wrongs are mine ! Yea, I call on the Sun’s pure splendour, and the multi-

tudinous smile of Ocean waves, and you, O Founts of the rivers, to witness what outrage an Immortal suffers at an Immortal's hand. Behold these shameful bonds, this living tomb where I must wrestle alone with never-ending pain—to this the new Lord of the world has doomed Prometheus for no other crime than giving man fire from heaven."

He paused awhile, communing with his own heart, then said, "Yet why do I lament? All this I foresaw from the beginning, and knew at how great a price I must win for mankind the thrice-blessed gift of fire, whereby alone they shall attain to mastery in every art that ministers to life. Nor will I upbraid the tyrant who has thus repaid my ancient kindness. Not he, but resistless Fate, has decreed my doom, and he also, in the hour ordained, must learn to submit, as I do."

Now while the captive Titan comforted his heart with the thought of what mankind would be able to accomplish by the means of fire, Zeus sat pondering how he might frustrate that good gift with some countervailing evil. For it is a law to all the Immortals, that none may take away what another has bestowed, nor could even he now deprive mortals of their new possession.

He purposed therefore to send them some gift so baneful that they should be never free from misery their lives long, and thus to fill up the measure of his vengeance upon Prometheus. After long thought, he called Hephæstus to him and said, "Hephæstus, I have devised a new thing, that has not its like in earth or heaven; now put forth all your skill, for you must forthwith make it, according to the fashion I will tell you."

"Of what shall I make it?" asked Hephæstus.

"Of whatever you can find most fair," said Zeus. "Mingle together all things loveliest, sweetest, and best, but look that you also mingle therewith the opposites of each."

So Hephæstus took gold and dross, wax and flint, pure snow and mud of the highways, honey and gall; he took the bloom of the rose and the toad's venom, the voice of laughing water and the peacock's squall; he took the sea's beauty and its treachery; the dog's fidelity, the wind's inconstancy; the cruelty of the tiger and the mother-bird's heart of love. All these, and other contraries past number, he blended cunningly into one substance, and this he moulded into the shape that Zeus described to him.

When it was finished, Hephæstus looked upon his handiwork and said, "We have made no new thing, but the image of a goddess."

"Nay," said Zeus, "we have made the First Woman," and with that he breathed upon the image, and it lived, and looked upon them wonderingly, as one suddenly awakened.

Then he called all the Olympians to behold the First Woman, and they marvelled at the beauty of her, for in truth she was fair as any goddess.

They cried that they would each offer her some gift on this her birthday, and so they did; the goddesses arrayed her in glorious apparel, Hephæstus decked her with jewels of cunning workmanship, and every god gave her some precious thing. Last of all, Zeus himself placed in her hands a casket of lustrous amber, richly overwrought with flowers and fruit of the pomegranate, and having two golden snakes for handles.

"Behold, Immortals," he said, "this new fair creature of my shaping thought, endowed with every earthly loveliness, laden with heaven's choicest treasures! Shall she not be named Pandora, All-gifted? Seems she not even as a bride adorned for her husband? But she is no mate for an Olympian, for she is mortal;

come, let us send her to wed with Epimetheus, in token that we bear him no ill-will for his rebel brother's sake."

The Olympians were well pleased, for they knew not the guileful intent of Zeus, and straightway he bade Hermes lead Pandora to the house of Epimetheus, and say to him, "The King of Gods, in sign of his goodwill towards you, sends you this peerless bride, who brings with her in this casket such a dowry as he only can bestow."

So Hermes brought the First Woman to Arcadia. Now when Epimetheus saw her beauty, and heard why she was come, he could scarce contain himself for joy at his good fortune, and he received the bride with her casket into his house, and wedded her that day, without once remembering the warning Prometheus gave him, not to take any gift from Zeus. But on the morrow it came back to his mind, and he repented of what he had done ; for this was his nature, that he was never wise until too late. From this he had his name of Epimetheus, which means *Afterthought*, even as his brother was called Prometheus, that is *Forethought*, because he was wise concerning things yet to come.

Epimetheus now reflected that the dowry Zeus

had given his bride was doubtless meant to work him some deadly harm, and he asked Pandora if she knew what lay in her amber box. "No, my husband," said she, "but I will fetch the box from our chamber and we will open it and see. I long to know what the great King of the Immortals has bestowed on us."

"Bide here, Pandora," said the Titan, "and listen well to what I shall say. My mind misgives me that yonder casket holds some evil secret, and he who sent it is not a friend but a subtle enemy. I was warned erewhile to take no gift at his hand, but in my folly I paid little heed. Now since what is done cannot be undone, and the gift is under my roof, here let it stay ; but I charge you on your love and obedience, never open the casket. For whatever it holds can do us no mischief while we keep it fast shut, and it is itself so royal-rich and beautiful a thing that I have no heart to cast it away."

Pandora was glad that she might keep the wondrous box, and every day she viewed it with delight as it shone like translucent gold in the sunlight. But after a while she wearied of that pleasure, and began to wonder more and more what might be hidden within it. Many a time, alone in her chamber, she sat gazing at the casket

until longing to learn its secret so nearly overcame her that she arose and went hastily forth, vowing to look on it no more. At last, in an accursed hour, she could resist her desire no longer ; she laid her hand upon the lid, and raised it gently—very gently, half-fearful of what she might see. Quick as thought out flew a swarm of tiny winged sprites, soaring and drifting upwards like breeze-blown tufts of thistledown, and they vanished like a wreath of smoke through the open doorway.

With a startled cry Pandora closed the box—but, alas ! too late ; one glance had shown her it was empty, and she sat down and wept tears of disappointment. Now, had she known what she had done, she must have grieved a thousand times more bitterly, for the sprites she had let loose were all the cares and woes and fell diseases that afflict mankind, and from that hour to this they fly abroad upon earth, pursuing hapless mortals from the cradle to the grave. Such was the dower that the First Woman brought with her into the world.

Epimetheus found his wife weeping, and she told him what had befallen, and he forgave her, and said, “Half the fault is mine, because I left the casket in your keeping. Its seems that it is as much a woman’s nature to be over-curious

as it is mine to be wise too late." And he forebore to reproach her, although he now knew well enough, by his power of afterthought, what those sprites were. He asked Pandora if she was sure they had all escaped, and she said "Yes." But by and by she thought she would look again, and when she opened the casket, she saw there was still one left, clinging beneath the gold rim that held up the lid, with its rainbow wings drooping as if broken. And something told Pandora that the name of it was Hope.

CHAPTER V

DEUCALION'S FLOOD

ONCE more the moon shone full over the forest, and Orpheus sat at the feet of the Nine.

"Why do you look at me so eagerly?" Melpomene said to him. "It is one of my sisters you must ask for the next tale."

"Of your grace, Lady," said he, "tell me first the end of your own story. What did Pandora do when she found Hope was left in the casket?"

"She pitied the fairy thing," answered Melpomene, "because it seemed half dead, and she laid it in her bosom, to warm it back to life. But when she had cherished it awhile, Hope crept into her heart, and made its abode there; and being comforted, it inhabits ever since the hearts of mortals. Sometimes they know that it is whispering falsehoods to them, but they cannot help listening, so sweetly it speaks, and it abides with them whether they will or no."

“But is not Hope a blessed thing?” asked the child; “I am sure I have heard my father say so. If Zeus so hated mortals, why did he not send them only evil sprites in Pandora’s box?”

“It was not Zeus,” said Melpomene, “who placed Hope in the casket, nor did he know it was already there when he put in the evil sprites. That marvellous box belonged first to Prometheus, and Zeus asked it of him as a gift, while they were yet friends. So Prometheus, foreseeing what Zeus would do with it in the end, hid Hope under the inner rim of the box, before he parted with it, for he knew nothing else would enable mortals to bear all the miseries that were coming upon them.”

“Ah, Lady!” cried Orpheus sadly, “I cannot rest for thinking of Prometheus. Must he indeed suffer for ever? Can it be that cruel Zeus will never repent?”

For all reply, Melpomene laid her finger on her lip, and there was silence awhile among the sisters.

Then gently spoke Calliope: “Remember, my Orpheus, what I said to you erewhile touching the Immortals. Only the foolish among men ever reproach the gods; the wise know that they move by dark and tangled ways to one sure

goal of righteousness. Remember also that Prometheus was not wholly guiltless, for he disobeyed one to whom he had sworn allegiance ; nor was Zeus without right on his side ; for if a king suffers his law to be set at nought his kingdom is brought to confusion."

"I will remember," said Orpheus, humbly, "and I will not call Zeus or any of the Immortals cruel or unjust. But O ! if I had been one of those men whom Prometheus helped in their great need, I think I must have gone to the world's end to find him and tell him I loved him, and would die to deliver him, if it were possible."

"Child," said Melpomene, with shining eyes, "that thought has not come to you alone. There is one, the greatest of your race, who even this very hour is faring on that same quest. How he speeds you shall learn before many moons pass by ; meanwhile, be content to know this—it is ordained that one born of woman must deliver Prometheus."

"And meanwhile," cried Thalia in her blithe tones, "there is enough said of these high and solemn matters. Is the night to steal away and no new story told ? Come, Orpheus, choose a tale, and I, to waste no time, will choose the teller."

With that she bound a rose-hued kerchief over her eyes, and thus blindfolded went laughing round the circle of her sisters, until, suddenly throwing her arms about one of them, "Who is this?" she cried. "Polymnia?" Then, pulling off the kerchief, "I have guessed well," said she. "Now, Orpheus, have you, too, made your choice?"

"Please you, Ladies all," said the boy, "I have heard what happened in the Age of Gold and the Age of Silver, and it seems there was a third Age, when the men of clay began to live on earth, after the great snowstorm of Cronos. I would hear now the name of the third Age, and whether it also passed away or still endures."

"It was called the Age of Bronze," answered the fair-haired Polymnia, "and I will tell you the reason, and how it likewise came to an end." And she did so in these words:—

IN process of time, twelve fair daughters were born to Pandora and Epimetheus, and when they were maidens grown they were given in marriage to the twelve tallest and goodliest of the men of clay. Now the time came for Pandora to die, for she had fulfilled the span of years that the Fates allotted to her, but all the Immortals who had helped to adorn her

for her bridal entreated Zeus that so much beauty should not be hidden in the grave. And he gave consent that Hermes should carry her alive to the Happy Isles, and permitted Epimetheus to dwell with her there. So those two passed away from the land of Arcadia to the realm of Cronos, and were the first of those highly favoured of the gods who have entered the Elysian fields when their earthly life was done.

After this, men began to be skilful in the use of fire, and by its aid they soon had tools and weapons of a better sort, for instead of chipping flints into arrow-heads and axes they found out the art of working copper and tin together in the furnace, and so made bronze. And of bronze they fashioned swords and shields, spear-heads, hammers, pincers, knives, chisels, and whatever else they needed whether for war or hunting or handicraft, because they did not know as yet the use of iron. In their pride at this new art they called themselves the Bronze Folk, and so the Age they lived in received also the name of Bronze. Meanwhile the changes that begun in the world when the Golden Age had passed went on apace; the Four Seasons were already such as now we see, and the years of mortal life were already but threescore and ten. But many never

reached that fulness of age, and those who did were for the most part feeble in body and mind, without joy in their days; for all manner of plagues and infirmities multiplied among men from the hour Pandora opened her casket. Nevertheless they were not long without remedy against these ills, which indeed would else have destroyed them utterly. Earth herself took pity on them, because she is the Mother of all and because the son she loved the best had formed them out of her own clay; and she brought forth healing herbs for their sake, and began to speak to them out of her hollow caves in their dreams by night, teaching them the use and virtue of each. Some of the dreamers were sore affrighted by the invisible Voice, but others hearkened diligently, and did according to its bidding, and so arose the first physicians, doers of good to their fellow-men. But as these physicians increased in knowledge and came to learn the subtle powers of baneful herbs also, some of them turned their art to evil uses, dealing in poisons and in deadly charms, against their private foes, or against any whom they were bribed to harm. And so arose the first wizards and warlocks, men held in great fear by all, who spent their lives in prying into

Earth's secrets for love of power and greed of gain, and were wise above what is lawful to mortals.

Now the Bronze Folk soon fell into greater wickedness than any that was done by the men of the Silver Age. For these slew in open fight when blind rage came upon them, but the Bronze Folk would slay in secret, by dagger or poisoned cup, and sometimes they hired others to do murder—and all through black envy and coveting their neighbours' goods. At first the whole land had been free to all; all found food and shelter where they could; and none had any possessions worth the stealing, only such poor gear as each man could easily make for himself. But now, he that found gold, silver, copper, or tin in the earth fenced the spot about and kept jealous guard there until he had dug up the precious metal; such a man was soon richer than his fellows by bartering his treasure trove for things of use and ornament, and woe betide him if he were not also stronger of hand and sharper of wit than they! If he were neither, it was his best shift to betake himself to some mighty man of valour, who would keep his wealth from plunderers for a tithe of the same, and this was the recourse of many.

And thus there arose the first King, being a most redoubted warrior, to whom so many of the richer sort paid tribute for protection that he had wherewithal to arm and maintain a band of fighting men, and he lorded it over all Arcadia. He was of great strength and stature, fierce and savage as a mountain wolf, and his name was Lycaon. In thirsting after gain, so that there was no manner of wickedness he would not do for the sake of it, Lycaon was neither better nor worse than the rest of the Bronze Folk; but in one thing he was more like to a wild beast than to a human creature, for he was an eater of men. Did any stranger come to the mountain fastness where he dwelt, the King would entertain him for seven days with the best of meat and drink, ever pressing him to take his fill of good cheer; and after that had him slain and roasted, and banqueted on his flesh.

In those days the Immortals walked freely upon earth, and having seen the abominable doings of the Bronze Folk, some of the gods brought report of them to Zeus. Hermes, who then and always loved to haunt Arcadia, on whose mountains he was born and reared, made special outcry against the folk who defiled

that fair land with their iniquities, and besought Zeus to take vengeance on them.

Then Zeus said he would make trial of their ways for himself, and he journeyed through Arcadia with Hermes in the guise of humble travellers, seeking hospitality. Everywhere they were roughly received and bidden pay in goods or gold before they tasted bite or sup; no man rich or poor would give them so much as a cup of water for kindness' sake. But at nightfall they came to the mountain where the King's house was, and he made them heartily welcome after his custom, and feasted them plenteously. Now there sat at his table one of the wisest of warlocks, and while they were all making merry the warlock whispered in the King's ear, "Do these guests no violence, for I perceive that they are gods in the likeness of men."

But Lycaon deemed that the warlock sought to beguile him and save these two men from being killed and eaten, having perhaps received a bribe from them. "I will soon see," he muttered, smiling evilly, "if you say truly. If these are gods they will know what manner of meat comes next upon the board, before they taste thereof." With that he spoke in undertones to a slave, who presently set a smoking

dish before the guests, of which Lycaon bade them eat, saying it was flesh of wild boar. Up started Zeus and Hermes at the sight of it, overturning the table with its ghastly burden; their mortal guise fell from them in the twinkling of an eye, and the King of gods stood revealed in all his terrible majesty before his cannibal host.

“Impious wretch!” he said in tones that shook the ground, “quit the human form you have too long disgraced and wear henceforth that of the beast to whom your vile soul is nearest akin! Be that your just doom, who have dared to pollute heavenly eyes with this sight abhorred.”

The long-drawn howl of a wolf broke from Lycaon as he turned to flee that dread presence; the near forest received him, already changed, into its gloomy shades; and there, a four-foot shaggy thing, he led the tribe of his new fellows, creatures less bloodthirsty and cruel than he had been of old.

It is said in Arcadia that Zeus consumed the house of Lycaon with flaming thunderbolts, and that a yew-tree grove sprang up where the accursed food was eaten, which if any man dare enter, he is straightway turned into a wolf, but recovers his own shape in the ninth year.

Now Zeus had assuredly destroyed by fire

not only the palace of the man-eater but the whole land and all the dwellers therein had not Hermes and others of the Immortals entreated him to spare their pleasant haunts. Then said he, "For your sakes I will not burn fair Arcadia, but I will send a great rain upon the earth, and all the Folk of Bronze shall perish by flood because of their iniquities. None shall escape, for they are all become abominable; I sought until I was weary, and found not one righteous man among them."

"King of us all," said Hermes, "it may be that there is yet one righteous man left, although we found him not. Bethink you how some of those evil-doers, when they turned us from their doors, cried mockingly, *Get you gone to Deucalion, the fool that takes delight in giving*. Should not this Deucalion be some good man, who would have made us welcome?"

"That you may put to the proof," answered Zeus. "Seek him out in your former guise and bring me word how you fare."

Forth went Hermes on his errand, and sure enough Deucalion received the stranger with all kindness, doing him honour with the best cheer he had. And when Hermes spoke of a recompense, Deucalion desired him to be silent. "Poor

I am, as you may see," said he, "but to what I have you are freely welcome, for I fear high Zeus, and he, they say, sends the guest."

"That is a true word," said Hermes laughing, and so went his way.

Now Deucalion was in truth a righteous man, and one moreover of generous and hospitable soul, who was content with little wealth and ever ready to bestow it on such as were poorer than he : which things his neighbours accounted folly, and they derided him continually, yet let him alone because he owned nought to move their envy. His wife's name was Pyrrha, and she was the eldest of the daughters of Pandora. These two had no children and were by now well stricken in years. Zeus heard with favour the report of Hermes concerning them, and being resolved to spare their lives he bade the messenger god return to Deucalion in his true likeness and warn him of the destruction coming on that wicked generation. Then, by the counsel and devising of Hermes, Deucalion went up into a mountain and cut him oaken timbers, and builded therewith an ark. And he prayed the god to let him go and warn the Folk of Bronze likewise, if peradventure they might repent and implore pardon of Zeus.

"Do as you list," said Hermes, "but for all the heed they will take you had as well plead with stones."

Even so it was; the wicked folk did but mock at Deucalion's tidings, and when they heard of his building an ark to float upon the waters, they mocked the more, crying that he was crazed in his wits. "Go to, fool," said they, "a truce with your raving. Have we not seen our valleys a score of times flooded, when the streams are swollen with the autumn rains? Did ever the waters rise up the hillsides, where stand our houses and sheepfolds? No, nor ever will; so let Zeus rain his worst, and as for your ark, our children's children will see it still lying high and dry, and laugh at the tale of the madman who built it."

So Deucalion left them to their doom, and went sorrowing to his house, and because Hermes had bidden him make no delay, he took Pyrrha his wife, and all the victual and household stuff that they two could carry, and brought them to the ark on the mountain. In his poor homestead there was neither bondman nor bondwoman, ox nor ass, for him to save alive; only a hound that went with him a-hunting, and a great cat that went hunting by

himself. The hound now followed Deucalion as he was wont, and the cat, with tail erect, trotted gravely at Pyrrha's heels, as though aware of what was coming.

The sky all that day had been heavily overcast with leaden clouds; towards evening the low sun looked forth with a wan, sickly glare, soon blotted out by curtains of rolling vapour. Night fell sudden and oppressive over land and sea, as it were the dropping of an ink-black, stifling pall; faint lightnings played athwart the lower edges of that vast canopy, and thunder began to mutter in the hot, pulseless air. Deucalion and his companions were crouching together beside the ark, waiting in fear and trembling for that which should betide; but the Bronze Folk sat in their houses, eating and drinking and making merry, and said one to another, "There is sure a great tempest toward—but what is that to us who are safely housed?" And when the rain began to fall, they thought of Deucalion, and said, "Tomorrow, when the rain has ceased, we shall see him come drenched and dripping from his leaking ark, and beg a seat at our warm hearths."

But the rain did not cease on the morrow, nor the day after, for Zeus had broken up

the fountains of the firmament, and their waters poured forth from the threshold of heaven like cataracts leaping from the cliff. Forty days and forty nights it rained in one vast torrent; the while it seemed as though there were no longer day or night, earth or sky, only a grey world of swirling water. A world filled at first with wild voices of the rivers as they rose and roared along the valleys—but ere long a world of deathly stillness. For lakes and streams rose higher and yet higher, until all were met and mingled in one boundless flood, whose swift, silent tide engulfed the hills to their very summits.

As the flood swept upward the Bronze Folk fled before it towards the hill-tops, and some of them it overtook sooner, some later, but late or soon they all perished in the waters. No living creature escaped out of all Arcadia (save in Deucalion's ark) except the birds of the air; and none was left alive there, except the wild beasts, who, being weatherwise, took refuge betimes on certain loftiest peaks that stood as islands in the watery waste.

Meanwhile, by the providence of Zeus, the frail ark rode safe among heaving billows, and when the forty days were past, it rested on a

peak of the mountain called Parnassus, that is in the country of Boeotia. Then Zeus closed up again the fountains of heaven, and by a mighty wind he drove back the waters from the face of the earth into limitless ocean, and the dry land appeared. Such was the end of the wicked race who had made so ill a use of that great gift Prometheus brought them.

When Deucalion and Pyrrha looked forth from the ark, and saw the waters abating on every side, and solid ground all about it, they came out, praising Zeus; and behold they were on a high mountain that they had never seen, and a strange country lay out spread below them. For a little while they made shift to live on that mountain, with the dog and the cat for companions, and Deucalion was content, busying himself in a hundred ways, as a man may do who is shipwrecked on some desert isle. But Pyrrha wearied for the sight of human faces and of the blue smoke rising at morn and eve from kindly hearths of men, and she wept to think she must no more hear the voices of children nor the young lasses merry at the milking, because she and her husband were left alone, the last of all their race. One day, sad at

heart, she wandered far down the mountain into a rocky glen, where was a darksome cave ; and as she passed by the mouth of the cave a voice from within it called to her by name. Pyrrha knew that one of the Immortals spoke to her, and she answered, trembling, "Here am I."

Then said the voice, "Weep no more, daughter of Pandora ; your sorrow is known and pitied of One who has power to turn it into joy. Would you raise up children to your husband from the ground who shall become a mighty folk and replenish the earth ? Then return to him quickly and say, 'We are bidden to cast behind us the bones of our Great Mother.'"

So Pyrrha returned to Deucalion with what speed she could, being no longer young or light of foot, and told him the words she had heard ; but when they considered the message they were troubled, doubting what it might mean. For only the gods knew what became of Pandora, whom Hermes carried secretly to the Happy Isles ; and Pyrrha said, "We know not the place of my mother's sepulchre, but even if we found it, how could we dare such an impious deed as to disturb her bones ?"

“Nay, wife,” said Deucalion, “none of the blessed gods would bid us do so wickedly. Let me think awhile.” And presently, “I have it!” he cried. “It is Earth who is our Great Mother—were we not formed of her substance?—and the bones of Earth are the rocks and stones.” Then they hastened to gather up stones in the folds of their garments, and cast them backwards over their shoulders, and behold the stones no sooner touched the ground than those Deucalion threw turned into men, and those his wife threw, into women.

Thus was a new race of mortals given breath and being, of whom the men that now live are the offspring, and with the great Flood the world entered upon its Fourth Age, which endures unto this day. The folk of this Age are not all of one nature, but some are just and pious as were the Golden race, some unjust and godless, like the races of Silver and of Bronze. So the world now is full of mingled good and evil, like a fruitful field where wheat and tares grow together. But those whose eyes are opened to behold the future, know that another and worse Age is yet to come, which shall be called the Age of Iron. Then the whole earth shall be full of tyranny and cruel bondage, so that the gods forsake it

utterly ; then shall the bitter cry of the oppressed rise day and night to the gates of heaven. In that far distant time men shall look back with longing to this our day, so fair and free will its life appear to them ; and they will call it the Age of the Heroes because of the great deeds done therein, which shall be sung and told from one generation to another. But when Fate's wheel has come full circle, the Iron Age shall likewise have an end, for the world shall be cleansed by fire, as once by flood, and from its ashes there shall arise a new heaven and a new earth.

CHAPTER VI

HOW APOLLO CAME TO DELPHI

"I HAVE been thinking," said Orpheus on the Fifth Night, "about the cave of Mount Parnassus, and the voice that spoke to Pyrrha, and there is one thing I would gladly know. Was it the great god Apollo who pitied her and showed her how she and Deucalion might raise up a new folk from the ground?"

"What know you of Apollo," said Calliope, "to make you guess it was he?"

"Only this," answered Orpheus, "that he speaks to mortals out of a cave on that very mountain, and pilgrims flock there from all lands to seek his divine counsel. I have heard my father talk of this many a time. He says there is a rich temple without the cave, filled with thank-offerings of the pilgrims, and that place is the holiest of all holy places."

"So it has been from the beginning," said

Calliope ; "but there was a time when the sanctuary was not Apollo's. Before he came there it belonged to Earth. She it was who spoke to Pyrrha, having compassion on her loneliness, and afterwards Deucalion built a temple at the cave's mouth and taught the new race of men to offer sacrifices and thanksgiving to Mother Earth."

"Sister," cried Thalia, "in answering one question you have opened the door for another. I am certain our Orpheus now wishes to ask how Apollo came to be lord of the shrine. Is it not so?" she added, smiling on the boy.

"You have spoken my very thought, Lady," said he.

"Then I myself will tell you the tale," replied Thalia, "for it is one after my own heart." So she told it in her clear gay voice.

FAR away in blue Southern waters there is a little rocky isle which men call Delos, but the gods in their tongue call it the Star of the Sea. For when they look down from high heaven they behold it as a gem of sparkling rays on the sea's bosom, so small it is and so resplendent with the golden roofs and rich-hued marbles of many-columned shrines, with the blaze of altar fires, and the crowded bloom of terraced gardens.

But once upon a time the isle lay desert, for it was a barren waterless rock, and, moreover, it stood not rooted to the sea-floor, but drifted on the waves as you may see a halcyon's nest afloat in the midwinter calm.

Now in the beginning of the reign of Zeus Earth took sore displeasure at him because he had punished the rebel Titans, and she brought forth the monster Typhon, huger than a mountain, having the form of a man down to the middle and that of a serpent below, and breathing clouds of fire from his nostrils. And the first view of him so affrighted the Olympians that they forsook the sky, in terror lest he should rear his hideous head over their battlements and fill their golden houses with noisome smother and flame. So they fled to earth, and wandered there in the shape of divers beasts and birds, the better to conceal themselves from the monster. Many adventures befell the divine exiles, but my tale tells only of one fair goddess, the gentlest and most gracious of them all, whose name was Leto. She, in the likeness of a quail, flew many days over land and sea, seeking some lonely hiding-place, and lighted at last upon the floating isle. Here it seemed that she might safely rest, and she took her own shape again, and laid her down

to sleep, very weary. Then Earth herself looked upon the sleeping goddess and loved her, Olympian though she was, for there was that in the face of Leto which none could behold without tenderness; and the All-Mother caused the sea-tost isle to take root in the bed of the deep, lest the rocking of the waves should mar her slumbers. So Delos stands fast unto this day.

Now when Leto had abode there but a little while, travail came upon her, and she brought forth her babe divine in a stony hollow by the sea, under the shade of a solitary palm. No sooner was he born than the whole isle blossomed so thick with flowers of all hues that scarce their leafage showed between; here the bare rock was carpeted with the purple and the gold of violet, hyacinth, crocus; yonder, where stunted thorns had been, a million roses spread their veil of pink and pearl, and high over all on craggy peak and ledge the lilies glittered like sheets of drifted snow. It seemed as earth and sea and sky thrilled with new joy at that blessed birth; the sun himself took on a heavenlier radiance, the laughing waves a purer sapphire, while all the air grew musical with flying voices, that sang, "Apollo is born! Hail, all hail, Apollo!"

But a joy above all joys was Leto's as she

beheld her glorious babe. She turned to seek for water that she might bathe his fair strong limbs, and straightway a pool, round and clear as a burnished mirror, shone forth beside the palm-tree. Now when she had bathed the child therein and swaddled him in her ambrosial veil, the fear took her that huge Typhon might spy the isle that glowed so bright and see them there, since there it had neither cave nor covert wherein to hide, but lay all open to his view.

"Alas ! my babe," she said, "this is no place for you and me. We must fly to some land of forest and mountain where we may lurk unseen of our fearful foe." And swift as thought she went gliding Westward over the bright sea, while the babe laughed and leaped within her arm for glee at the speed of their going and the sight of the dancing waves.

At last they came to a land of forest and mountain, even the land of Greece. Onward and still onward the gentle mother journeyed through the woodlands, and found no place that she deemed secure from all espial until she had wandered to the foot of towering Parnassus and the rock-bound glen that is called Delphi. Here she saw some way off the low portal of a cave, half muffled from view in a thicket of flowering

bay, and having set down her child, she went towards it to see if they might safely house within. But as she reached that portal she started back in terror, for with menacing hiss the watcher of the threshold barred her way—a python of dappled skin and ruby eye. The great snake reared himself aloft and fixed on Leto a glare so baleful that she stood rooted to the spot. She felt upon her the hot breath of his wide-stretched jaws, and though an Immortal, shuddering dread possessed her. In another moment his enormous coils would crush her tender body—she, who could not die, must yet feel the pains of death, and O more bitter far, she could not stir to save her little one from a like fate! Then suddenly came a silvery cry, “Apollo! I am Apollo!” and an arrow sang through the air past Leto’s head and pierced the throat of the python.

Down dropped he, choked with his dark blood, writhing his scaly bulk in the death-throe; one gurgling hiss he gave, and with that he died. Amazed, the goddess turned to see who had sped that shaft, and behold, the mighty Babe had cast off his swaddling bands and came bounding to her side, his eyes alight with joy. And in his hand was a gleaming bow.

“My well-beloved,” said his mother, “can it

be that your baby hand slew this monster? Tell me, how came you by that bow?"

"I made it, mother," said the little god.

"But till now you have never left my sight," she murmured wondering. "When did you make it, sweet son?"

"When the need came," he answered; and then, holding high his golden head, "Am I not Apollo?" he cried in a great voice.

Then Leto kept silence, glorying in her heart; for she perceived that she had borne one who in wisdom and power would be great among the Olympians, seeing that of himself he had devised the fit weapon for that instant peril and had created it by his will. The gentle goddess shuddered again as she looked on the dire creature from whose jaws he had delivered her—as she thought. Alas! she knew not that the snake would have done her no harm; he was a wise and aged beast, knowing no other food than the milk and cakes and honey men offered before that cave, and his fierce, threatening aspect was but meant to frighten her from entering his lair.

Apollo plucked forth his arrow from the dead serpent, and crying, "I will see what he guarded here," ran lightly into the cave. The sunny



Amerson photo

APOLLO AND THE NINE MUSES

From the painting by GIULIO ROMANO



brightness that streams from the persons of the Olympians made a glory round about him in the thick darkness within, and showed him a veiled figure sitting on a throne of gold. The throne was set over a cleft in the cavern floor, and before the throne he saw what seemed a stone altar, but of strange shape, being like an egg half sunk in the ground. He saw, too, that meat-offerings and drink-offerings and jewels of price lay heaped around the altar, and forthwith he strode boldly to the throne, and cried, "Arise, Unknown! Yield me place, for I, Apollo, have slain the keeper of the shrine and am lord here henceforth."

No answer came from the motionless figure, and Apollo stamped his little foot in anger, and bent his bow the second time. At that the veiled one started up, a tall and ghostly shape, and with shriek upon shriek fled past him out of the cavern. Leto caught one glimpse of a pale, anguished face as it went fleeting by, and hastening within she found her son already seated on the throne, and said, "Alas! child, what have you done? This was some goddess of the Nether-world, for I saw her countenance, not bright like those of the Olympians, yet none the less divine."

But Apollo laughed, and bade his mother be content, since he had won her a dwelling-place and himself much renown. So they abode in the cave, and when they had been there not many days, the birds of the air brought them tidings that Zeus had dared a combat with enormous Typhon and slain him, and was returned to his palace on high with all his kin.

Meanwhile, she whom Apollo dispossessed was making her moan to Earth, whose daughter and prophetess she was. For Earth was wont to send up whispering voices of soothsay through the cleft in the cavern, but it was not granted to mortals to hear them plainly. Therefore she made Themis her daughter priestess of the solemn shrine that she might interpret the voices to men, and gave her the great python for a warder. And the shrine was enriched with many gifts by those to whom Themis revealed things to come.

Now when Themis told how the young Olympian had seized upon her throne of prophecy, Earth was wroth for her sake, and thought upon revenge. So she sent night-wandering phantoms abroad among men, which brought them clear messages in dreams ; and no more pilgrims came with gifts to Delphi, because visions revealed

to every sleeper the things he desired to know. But the device was not hidden from Apollo, and forthwith he sped up to the heavenly halls and clung with his childish hands to the throne of Zeus, making loud complaint that he was robbed of his dues.

"What dues are those?" said great Zeus smiling, "and who has wronged a babe like you?"

"O King," answered Apollo, "the ancient shrine of Earth is now mine by right of conquest, for I won it with my bow, but the revenue of gifts that should come to me Earth defrauds me of, sending men dreams and visions, so that they have no need to seek my cave for soothsay. Grant me some redress, lest here I stay and weary all the gods with outcry against you."

Then Zeus laughed loud and long, well pleased to see fair Leto's little son already thus eager for lordship and for tribute.

"Threaten us not, bold warrior," said he in pleasant mood, "for redress you shall have, and that speedily."

Then, bending his majestic brows in token that his promise was sure, he gave command to Earth that her midnight phantoms should visit men no more. Nor dared she resist his sovereign

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will, and ever thenceforth Apollo holds sway in Delphi, lord of a glorious dwelling, where oracles of unfailing truth are given to mortals from his golden chair beside Earth's ancient altar-stone.

CHAPTER VII

THE MOTHER AND THE MAID

THEN all the Nine rose up together and chanted a hymn in praise of Leto's golden-haired child, the Delian-born, the archer invincible, king in holy Delphi. They sang how he increased in wisdom and stature until he came to that fulness of youthful bloom which he wears eternally ; how Zeus loved him as a son and made him revealer of his will to mortals ; how sullen Earth was reconciled to him ere long, being made glad with his beauty as with a lasting Spring. They hailed him Prophet and Seer, nor by these names alone, for Apollo, they sang, is the Lord and Giver of all healing, and of all sweet minstrelsy. While they were yet singing the sun arose, and Orpheus heard no more.

That day he said to his father, " Father, if you could leave your work awhile, would you not journey to Delphi, and see that marvellous

temple, and hear what the god would say to you ? ”

“ Nay, child,” said his father sighing, “ it is not to Delphi I would go. Men seek Apollo’s temple when they desire counsel for time coming, not when they need comfort for what is past. For that, as I have heard, one must go on pilgrimage to the Goddesses at Eleusis.

“ Who are they, father ? ” asked Orpheus, “ and where is Eleusis ? ”

“ Their names are not lightly spoken,” answered Oiaeros, “ but men call them the Mother and the Maid. As for Eleusis, it is the place of their sanctuary, far away in the South country, so far indeed that I have never met with any who has been there. I would,” he added in a lower tone, “ I knew if tales say truly, that there a man may find peace.”

“ Peace ! ” repeated Orpheus wonderingly ; “ but have we not peace here in the forest ? ”

“ Ask me no more,” said his father, “ for you are too little to understand.”

So the child kept these things in his heart, and when the Sixth Night came he asked the Sisters for the story of those goddesses whom men called the Mother and the Maid. Then one who was sitting a little apart, playing softly on a flute, laid

it down and said, "With your good will, sisters, I should gladly tell this tale."

"Say on, Euterpe," cried they all.

"But first," said Thalia, "let us hear for prelude the strain that pilgrims march to along the Sacred Way of Eleusis. Listen, Orpheus, and you shall fancy you too are drawing near the presence of the goddesses."

The flute-player smiled, and began an air that seemed the very breathing of a soul uplifted in rapturous hope. Orpheus closed his eyes, and heard as in a dream the echoing footfalls of a multitude, and for one strange moment it was as though he were one of that throng invisible, hastening onward, onward to behold some great sight—he knew not what. The strain ceased, and looking up quickly, he cried, "The pilgrims! What is it they go to see? O, tell me how to join them, that I may see it too."

"Patience, my child," said Calliope tenderly, "the day is yet far distant when you shall set out upon that pilgrimage, and it is not we who will be your guides. So now listen well to Euterpe's story."

Then Euterpe took the child's hand in hers, and thus began:—

THE goddess Demeter was the fairest daughter

of Earth, and many of the Olympians sought her in marriage, but she would none of them—nay, she refused to wed with Zeus himself, for she desired no lord over her, but rather to live as she listed. One day when the Immortals were feasting together, certain of the goddesses who were mothers fell to boasting of their children, and mocked at Demeter because she was childless. And being grieved thereat, she left the heavenly halls and came and entreated Earth that she might likewise have a child. The All-Mother granted her prayer, and while Demeter sojourned in the lovely land of Sicily, a daughter was born to her, whom she named Persephone. But when the child began to speak, she called herself in baby fashion, *Koré*, that is, *Girl*, and Demeter, as mothers will, fondly used that name for her darling. The little *Koré* grew up to maidenhood in the soft Sicilian meads, herself fair and pure as the lilies she walked among. Never was maiden so tenderly reared as she, and never mother and daughter loved one another so dearly as these two, who were seldom parted for a single hour.

Now Zeus was ill pleased that beautiful Demeter came no more to his palace on high, nor had he forgotten the slight she put upon him in refusing to be his queen. So when he knew that all her

joy was in sweet Koré, he bided his time, saying to himself, "Let the haughty goddess who spurned all suitors beware her child meet not with one who will brook no denial."

When Koré had seen fourteen summers, it chanced that as she walked with her mother in a wooded vale, they came to a deep, shady pool, and because the day was hot the maiden was fain to bathe in it. As she came out of the water, she spied a bright mirror of silver lying in the grass, and took it up, and looked therein. "See, mother," she cried, "what a beautiful thing this is! Look, it will show you your face more clearly than the clearest water."

Demeter took the mirror and laughed, remembering that her girl had never seen one, but when she looked therein she turned pale, for it showed her not her own face, but the face of Koré. She turned it swiftly, lest Koré should see, and stole another glance while making pretence of haste to robe her. There was her child's face still, as it were a picture painted by art divine.

"May I keep it, mother?" asked Koré, wringing out her long wet tresses.

"No, sweetheart," answered Demeter; "it is an evil thing, made by art magical," and so saying she flung the mirror far into the pool.

Koré could not forbear a cry of disappointment as it flashed and sank, but her mother comforted her with the promise of another like it, only much more beautiful, which the smith-god Hephæstus should make for her. "I did well," thought Demeter as they went homewards, "for aught I know, the thing was laid in my child's way by some envious witch to cast a spell on her. There can be no good in such a mirror as that—but at least it can work no harm where it is now."

But in this the goddess was mistaken, little knowing whither she had sent the mirror. Down it sank, deeper than ever plummet sounded, for the water of that pool rose straight up from the gloomy Underworld, out of a fountain in King Pluto's palace-garden. And as Pluto walked in his garden of poppies he saw a glimmering thing in the black marble basin of the fountain, and drew it forth, and behold it was a silver mirror. But instead of his own face, it showed him the face of a young maiden, divinely fair, with starry eyes that smiled as if alive. The dark-browed King stared upon that perfect face like one spell-bound, and still it moved not nor changed, turn the mirror as he would. "It is not a vision," he muttered, "it is a picture—and yet it cannot be—it lives! This is some enchantment. I will go to

Hecate, Queen of Witches, and learn what it may mean."

So he went through the nether shades to the house of Hecate, and the Queen of Witches came forth to meet him and said, "What would my lord with me, and why is his countenance troubled? Is it so unpleasing to him that a water-lily has bloomed in the fountain of his garden?" "Hecate," answered Pluto, "do not jest with me, for I see you know what brings me here. Tell me, mistress of all spells, whence this mirror came, and what it is. If it holds the likeness of a living maiden, tell me where I may find her, for be she goddess or mortal, I will make her my bride and queen."

"King," said Hecate, "touching the mirror I would not, if I were you, be over curious. What more concerns you to know is that the maiden you see therein is Persephone, daughter of Demeter."

"Then I go to Sicily," cried the King, "for there, as I hear, the goddess has made her abode, and I will ask her this very day for her daughter's hand."

"Not so hasty," said the Queen of Witches. "Think you Demeter, she who would not wed Olympian Zeus, will give Persephone to his

brother? The maiden is the apple of her eye, and never will she consent to lose her, least of all by sending her to this dark realm of yours."

"Show me, then, the way to win the maiden," said Pluto, "and you shall have what reward you will."

"Nay," Hecate answered, "I have had my reward already. But you shall, if it please you, restore me something that is my own."

"Very willingly," said the King. "What may it be?"

"The mirror," replied the Queen of Witches, smiling subtilely.

So, when he had heard her counsel, Pluto gave her the enchanted mirror, and went his way.

Now the reward Hecate had received already was this. She is a goddess of the Underworld, and has her dwelling there, but by night she roams on earth, and when the moon is full she has power in heaven, which none else of the nether gods may darken with their presence. This power was the price she asked of Zeus, when he bade her devise a spell whereby King Pluto should become enamoured of Demeter's daughter. For if that were brought to pass, Zeus knew his stern brother would rob Demeter of her one treasure though she guarded it never so jealously.

The Queen of Witches, having obtained from Zeus the promise she required, went home and so wrought by her enchantments on the mirror that it should keep for ever the likeness it first reflected, and she caused it to appear when and where it did, that none but Koré might be the first to look therein. Had the maiden kept it, full soon would the Witch-goddess have spirited it away again, but now all had fallen out as she desired.

Not long after this, Koré came to her mother, where she sat spinning fleecy wool from her golden distaff, and prayed her leave to go gathering flowers in the meadows.

"Go, heart's delight," said Demeter, "only stray not far away. Stay in the near fields, where I shall hear you if you call."

Koré promised obedience, and with light heart she took her way along the blossomy meadows, singing aloud in the glad May morning. Soon she had filled the lap of her robe with flowers of all hues, and sat down on a primrose bank to weave them into garlands. While she was thus busied, three beautiful damsels dressed in green, with green wreaths on their hair, stood beside her and greeted her courteously, and timidly she asked them who they were.

"We are wood-nymphs from the hills," said one, "come down to play in these fair fields, and to gather flowers, like you. Ah, you are weaving May-lilies—if you will come with us a little way we will show you far lovelier ones. See!" she said, and held out a handful of fragrant snowy bells, lovelier indeed than Koré had ever seen.

Koré longed to see where they grew, but remembering her promise she told the damsels that she must not wander beyond sight of home.

"Then play with us here awhile, fairest maiden," they said, and Koré, nothing loth, began a merry game of ball with these friendly strangers. But in the eagerness of play she did not mark how the damsels drew her ever farther and farther afield, as they tossed their painted ball from hand to hand, until, flushed and panting, all the players threw themselves down on a grassy knoll to rest. Then Koré saw she was come to a green plain unknown to her, and starting up ashamed, "O," she cried, "I should not have come so far! I must hasten home. Where lies the way?"

"Nay now, what harm?" said one of the damsels. "'Tis but a short way, and you cannot miss it. And now you may take home those loveliest lilies—see, they are yonder in the dell."

Yonder in sooth were the lilies, blowing in

myriads on the farther margin of a brook that ran through a mossy hollow of the plain.

Koré sprang down the knoll, and tripped on her white bare feet through the shallow stream. "I will stay but a moment," she thought, and as she plucked the flowers, "Kind damsels," she called, "will you not come hither and help me gather?"

"We cannot," answered they all in low, strange tones. "We dare not cross running water."

At that word Koré looked back sore affrighted, for she knew none save witches and warlocks thus fear running water, and even as she looked the damsels vanished into air. That same instant she felt the ground quake under her with a long, muffled roar, and saw a black chasm yawn at her very feet. Terror bereft the maiden of power to stir; one shriek of "Mother!" came from her pale lips, then with rigid hands still clasping her lilies she sank down in a swoon. And thus she saw not how there rose out of the chasm a sulphurous cloud, and in the midst thereof a fiery chariot, and four coal-black steeds with eyes of flame; nor knew she that the dark charioteer caught her up in one strong arm and bore her downward into the gulf, just ere the trembling earth closed once more.

It was now high noon, and Demeter rose up from her spinning to make ready a midday meal of barley-cakes and honey and wild fruits. Then she called her daughter once and again from the doorway, but no voice replied. "The child has fallen asleep," she thought, "resting somewhere in the shade," and she went a little way from the house, calling as she went. Still Koré did not answer, and the mother's heart began to beat fast with disquietude. Vainly she searched the meadows far and near, vainly scanned every shady nook and every cool resting-place by stream or spring. All the long day the goddess wandered distracted to and fro ; now speeding on with frantic haste, now pausing in heart-sick doubt whither to turn, and ever calling louder, more despairingly, her lost one's name. Ranging further and further she came at last to a dell, where lilies bloomed beside a bubbling fount, and lo ! amongst them lay Koré's silver-broidered veil. Demeter snatched it up and kissed it with tears, crying, "She has been here ! Ah, beloved, how could you stray so far alone ? Surely she is near—she cannot have gone further than this. Koré, Koré, answer me !"

But all was silent around save for the bubbling water.

Now there was no sign to be seen of Koré's fate, neither trace of the rending of the ground ; the little brook, indeed, was swallowed up, but King Pluto had caused it to well forth again as a fountain, and hidden its former course under the flowery sward. Nor could Demeter find any token of her child's presence in that peaceful-seeming spot, except the veil that had slipped from her hair while she bent over the flowers.

Baffled, yet with reviving hope, she went questing hither and thither through all the region round, and at shut of eve came to the slopes of Etna. Then there met her a giant shepherd, of the race of the one-eyed Cyclopes, driving his flocks home from pasture, and she asked him if he knew aught of her daughter. But he had seen nothing and heard nothing of such a maiden.

"I will halloo to my brothers and kinsmen," said he ; "it may be they can give you word of her," and with uncouth bellowing he summoned to him the rest of the Cyclopes. But neither could they give the goddess any tidings, and in her weariness she sat down and wept. The giant folk pitied her grief, and would have had her lodge with them till the morning, sharing their rough cheer, but she would not stay, nor break

her fast, and having begged of them two kindled pine-brands for torches, she took her way onwards through the shades of night.

Dawn found that sorrowing mother still upon the quest, and for many a day thereafter she searched through all the isle of Sicily. At last she came again to her house, hoping against hope to find Koré returned—and her house was silent and desolate.

When she saw that, the goddess tore the golden fillets from her hair, and cast dust upon her sacred head, and instead of her shining robes she put on a coarse and sable vesture, and veiled herself with a veil of darkest grain. And she swore by the dread oath that binds all the immortal gods, that she would never suffer her eyelids to slumber nor her feet to rest until she had found Persephone, though she should search the wide world through. Then, staff in hand, she journeyed forth once more.

What tongue may tell of all her long, sad wanderings over sea and land? Of all she met, of the shy woodland nymph and shaggy satyrs on the hills, of the sea-fairies on lonely beaches, of mortal wayfarers and villagers, she asked for tidings of Koré, and always she asked in vain.

Meanwhile Earth, her mother, mourned with

the mourning goddess, and fain would have whispered that she knew what had befallen Koré, but fear of Zeus and Pluto held her silent. So in every land where Demeter passed grieving, all living creatures of Earth and all green things began to droop and languish, as though her tears blighted where they fell. The cattle sickened in the withered pastures, the tilled fields yielded no harvest, famine and plague laid waste the homes of men. Zeus sent his rain, but it availed not, for the stubborn ground would no longer drink it, and it arose again in low-hanging, steaming mists, laden with pestilence. Nor could the sun disperse those vapours, so dimmed with sorrow was his bright visage as he beheld the affliction of Demeter.

Meanwhile the goddess came into the land of Greece, and drew near to a village called Eleusis. There, being wearied, she sat her down on a great stone by the wayside near to a well. It was towards evening, and the women of the village came to the well to draw water, and when they saw the pale mourner sitting there in poor and sombre garb, they began to mock and revile her, as was their custom with strangers, bidding her begone for a prowling beggar-wife. Demeter regarded them silently with her great, patient

eyes, and the divine sorrow of that gaze might have pierced hearts of flint. But in their blind malice the women were the more enraged that she sat there serenely silent as one who heard not, and with one accord they caught up stones and sherds to pelt her withal. Suddenly their shrill, fierce gabbling changed to screeches of eldritch laughter, their bright blue robes turned feathery on their dwindling bodies, and the next instant they fluttered aloft and fled to the woods—a troop of screeching jays.

Now came by the well a little boy with curly head, and looked curiously at the goddess, still sitting tranced with sadness. He passed, turned back to look again, and stole gently to her side. Children are clearer-eyed than older mortals to discern the gods, and though Demeter suffered him not to know her for what she was, the boy could feel that she was some great one—perhaps a banished princess.

“Are you unhappy, Lady,” he said to her, “or only wearied? And why do you sit so late by the wayside?”

“Both weary and sad at heart am I, my child,” answered Demeter, “and I sit here because none in Eleusis have any kindness for a stranger.”

“You cannot have heard of my father,” said

the little boy, "or you would not say so. He makes all strangers welcome; and so does my mother, for they say a guest brings a blessing to the house. If you will come with me, Lady, I know they will gladly give you shelter."

"Give me your hand, child," said Demeter, "and lead me to your house."

So they went both together, and when they came to the house the father and mother received the stranger with all kindness, bidding her sit down and sup with them. "There is dearth and murrain in the land," said the good man, "or we would give you better fare than these barley bannocks." But Demeter said she needed nothing save a draught of water, and leave to repose herself beside the hearth that night, for she was under a vow to fast and keep vigil.

Now, when all the household had gone to rest and were sleeping soundly, the mother, whose name was Metaneira, awoke, and heard a sound like the crackling of a fire. She rose up softly to see what this could be, and opened the door between her chamber and the house-place, where they had left the stranger woman. Ah, what a sight was there for a mother's eyes! A great fire blazed upon the hearth, and the stranger was holding over the flames the motionless body of

her little son. Metaneira's shriek aroused her husband, and both rushed together upon the stranger. But she drew back, clasping the child to her bosom, and suddenly her pale, worn face was transfigured with light celestial, so that their eyes dazzled to look on it; golden gleams suffused her raiment, divine fragrance streamed about her, as she stood before them, a goddess manifest.

"Celeus and Metaneira," she said to the trembling pair, "for the kindness you have showed me I would have made your son immortal by the virtue of flame, but now that may not be. None may renew that sacred spell, if it is broken in the making. Take your child, Metaneira; he is unhurt, and will awake anon, knowing naught of what has passed. Bid him farewell from the stranger-woman, and say she will one day return." With these words the goddess departed out of their sight.

In the morning Celeus went early to his granary that he might thresh what little barley remained there, for his wife to grind, because their meal-barrel was empty. And behold the granary was full of barley to overflowing, and as he ran to tell his wife she came to meet him crying, "The meal-barrel that I emptied last night is full of

meal." Then they gave thanks to the unknown goddess, and Celeus built an altar beside his hearth, whereon he and his in after-time offered tithes of first-fruits to Our Lady of the Corn.

After this Demeter came to the town of Hermione, by the sea, and now at last she heard tidings. Of all the gods, the folk of that place honour most King Pluto, who has a temple hard by the town, in a cypress grove. It is not lawful for any man, even Pluto's priest, to set foot within that temple, for it is builded over a chasm in the earth that leads down into the realm of darkness. Thither came Demeter, and saw an altar of stone before the temple, with this inscription: "TO PLUTO, KING IN HADES," in letters worn and ancient. But underneath, in letters newly graven, was added, "AND TO QUEEN PERSEPHONE." Then Demeter's heart burned within her, yet she restrained herself, and said to the grave priest of the sanctuary, "Pluto I know, but whose is this new name I see graven on his altar?"

"The god has made known to us," said he, "that he has taken to himself a bride, and will have us honour her with all the honours that we render to him, by that name you see."

When she heard that, Demeter left him and went swiftly to the halls of Zeus, and stood in her

mourning garb before his throne, making bitter complaint that Hades' King had carried her daughter into captivity. Zeus sought to appease her with smooth words, but Demeter would not hear him. "Tell me not," she cried, "that Persephone is queen of vast dominions. Rather would I see her thrall to the meanest mortal that looks on the light of day than reigning in the kingdom of the dead. Bid Pluto restore my child, or I will curse the ground that hides her from me with the curse of a desolate mother."

Then Zeus, fearing lest that curse should blast the whole earth, and men forsake his altars when they saw he could not save them, called the Sisters Three, who spin the threads of fate for mortals and immortals, and bade them declare the lot appointed for Persephone.

"It is ordained," they answered, "that Pluto shall let her go free if she has tasted no food in the Underworld, but not otherwise."

Thereupon Zeus sent Hermes, his messenger, to the house of Pluto to ask Persephone if she had eaten of anything since she came there. Now the Maid in her grief had tasted neither meat nor drink at Pluto's table, but wandering alone in his garden she had plucked a pomegranate and eaten one morsel. So, when the

messenger of Zeus inquired of her whether she had taken food in that house, she answered "No." But a servant of King Pluto, called Ascalaphus, had seen her taste the pomegranate, and he told Hermes, who brought word of it to Zeus. After which Ascalaphus repented, and not enduring to behold her whom he had betrayed, fled to upper earth, where he lurked in woods and caves, eating his heart, until Demeter had compassion on him and changed him to a screech-owl, the bird that still bodes ill-luck.

And so Persephone must have dwelt for ever in the sunless realms had not Zeus, in dread of her mother's curse, prevailed on her stern Lord to let her revisit earth for the half of every year. Thus with each returning spring she rises again into the sunlit world, and once more feels her mother's arms about her as they kiss with happy tears, the while hill and vale, forest and field, and all that therein is, break forth into joy and singing at the trysting of Demeter and her Koré. Then roam they far and wide, visiting with their blessing pasture and cornland; and never stand the meadows so deep in sweet herbage, never ripens the grain so full and ruddy, as where the goddesses have set their printless feet. To many lands they come, and Demeter sees again in joy regions she

traversed once in solitary grief ; but best they love Sicily, for the sake of the Maid's blissful childhood, and next Eleusis, where first a kindly roof sheltered the mourning Mother. Some say, moreover, that Eleusis was the place of Persephone's uprising ; but the truth is, no man may know the place made sacred by that resurrection, unless the goddesses reveal it to him, and then he may not speak of it.

True nevertheless it is that they show grace and favour in especial measure to those who seek their temple at Eleusis, and that the temple itself was once the house of Celeus ; for in due time Demeter returned thither, as she had said, and showed herself to his son, Triptolemus, who was become a lad. In those days men ate bread of barley and of rye, for wheat was yet unknown, and they tilled the ground with mattocks and hoes. Triptolemus was threshing barley in the threshing-floor when the goddess stood before him, bearing a wheatsheaf in her arms, and he lifted up his eyes and cried, "It is Our Lady of the Corn." Then Demeter made herself known to him, and gave him the wheatsheaf, bidding him sow the new grain in his father's fields, and she taught him also to make and to use the first plough. And before she departed

she charged Triptolemus to share these her gifts with the folk of that country, teaching them to plough the fallow fields and to sow Demeter's grain, which should be the staff of man's life for all time to come.

When Celeus heard these things he thought himself no longer worthy to inhabit the dwelling which so great a goddess had twice hallowed with her presence, and removing thence with all his household, he set it apart as a temple to her honour. And at the sacrifice of dedication the Mother and the Maid appeared in sight of all, standing upon the altar with looks of benign majesty. "In this house," said Demeter, "Celeus ever sheltered the homeless and gave freely of his store to the needy, yea, when he believed that he must lack for bread on the morrow. Therefore he shall dwell here our priest, and steward of our hidden treasure, whereby many shall be made rich."

"To this house," said Persephone, "Triptolemus guided my mother when she was weary and broken-hearted. For this cause the weary and broken-hearted shall never seek comfort here in vain, and Triptolemus shall be our chosen servant, to guide the feet of many into the way of peace."

Now as they promised so it was, and in the sanctuary where Celeus and his son first ministered, the mystic rites of Eleusis bring light out of darkness to all souls that turn with faith unfeigned to the Mother and the Maid.

CHAPTER VIII

PRINCE CADMUS OF PHŒNICIA

IT was now midwinter, and on the night of full moon Orpheus had sat late in the warm glow of the log-fire listening to the talk of some of the woodmen, who were come to roast chestnuts and drink a cup of wine at his father's hearth. And at his waking in the enchanted glade he asked that he might hear next the adventures of King Cadmus. One of the Nine looked up from the rose-garland she sat weaving and bade him say why he chose that tale. "Because, Lady," said he, "the woodmen spoke to-night of some good fortune that has come to a neighbour, and they said he was as lucky as King Cadmus. I asked who Cadmus was, and they told me his name was an old byword in the country, because the gods made him the luckiest of all men ; but they knew no more of him, except that he was a king of Thebes in the ancient days."

"Tell him, dear Erato," said Calliope to her with the roses; "tell him how Cadmus came by that name of Fortunate, which indeed he deserved more than any mortal. For it is a pleasant hearing, and his high good fortune was a gift from the goddess whose dealings with men are your chosen theme for song."

Erato shook the roses from her lap, and beckoning Orpheus to her side, she began the tale, in tones more honey-sweet and low than he had heard from any of the Sisters.

IN Phœnicia, land of palms, there was once a king who had seven sons and one daughter, his youngest-born. This maiden, whose name was Europa, was as beautiful as the day, the apple of her father's eye, and the darling of the seven princes, her brothers. Her mother died when she was but a child, and for her sake the King would take no second wife—such tales had he heard of stepdames and their cruel ways—but gave the little princess into the care of nurses and handmaids, to whom she ever showed herself so gentle and gracious that they loved her with all their hearts.

It came to pass, when Europa was a maiden grown, that she went with her women to gather saffron in the meadows on a morn of spring.

And as they busily plucked the crocus flowers, laden with the orange saffron-dust, they saw a stately bull, as white as snow, come pacing towards them through the mead, lowing as he came. Europa's handmaids drew aside with little cries of alarm as the mighty creature came nearer, and stood regarding them with his great flashing eyes, but the princess cried, "Be not afraid, my maidens! See how quietly he stands, as though to tell us he means no harm. He is a gentle beast, and tame; perhaps the king of some temple herd, for see how glossy is his milk-white coat, and his horns are gilded."

With that she went close to the bull, and stroked his dark, velvety muzzle, and said, laughing, "Ah, King of Bulls, methinks you are proud of your beauty, and are come to show it us."

The bull lowed softly and knelt at Europa's feet, bowing his splendid head to the very ground. "Here is a steed fit for a princess," she said merrily, and in girlish frolic she seated herself upon his back and bade him carry her to the sea-shore nigh at hand. Forthwith the bull rose up and bore the princess onwards with slow, majestic gait, the while she grasped with one hand

his golden horn, and looked back, laughing, to her maidens, who followed, marvelling.

Thus rode she, as it were in festal pomp, a coronal of crocus on her bright hair, even to the sea's marge, and now the bull walked sedately along the edge of the tide, dipping his hoofs in the shallow sparkling waves. "Princess!" cried the handmaids, "will you not turn back? We have come far already and it is time we were making homeward." But if Europa answered they heard her not; for with a far-resounding mighty bellow the bull plunged suddenly into the waves, and swimming more swiftly than a dolphin bore his rider far out to seaward. Before the terrified women could draw breath to cry out, Europa's white mantle was but a speck upon the violet deep, and while they shrieked and wrung their helpless hands, their mistress was lost to sight among the distant billows.

Words would fail to tell the grief of the King and all his house when those weeping handmaids came home with their tidings. It was plain to the King that he who had carried off his daughter was no bull, but an enchanter who had taken that shape to entice her away. "I grow old and feeble," he said to his sons, "or I would myself go forth into the world to find Europa, and bid

you all go likewise. But as it is, I cannot leave my kingdom, and have need of strong helpers to rule my folk. This, then, I am resolved upon ; six of you shall bide here with me, but Cadmus, the youngest, shall go in quest of his sister across the sea. And I charge him, on pain of a father's curse, that he never return to Phœnicia until the lost is found."

Prince Cadmus was a youth of a dauntless spirit, and he set sail with good hope upon his quest, doubting not to achieve it in the end. But the gods willed otherwise, for though he travelled far and wide in the Western lands beyond the sea, not one word could he hear of an enchanter or a captive princess. At last he heard report of the ancient and renowned temple that is in Delphi, and he journeyed thither with his train to inquire of the oracle. And Apollo's priestess, having entered the inmost shrine, cloudy with fragrant incense, where none but she may set foot, thus spake to him from her golden chair of prophecy : " Prince of Phœnicia, seek no more thy sister Europa ; forget also thine own people and thy father's house. For it is well with the maid, and she dwells even now in a glorious island home, no captive but a queen. There in no long time shall her aged father behold her again with joy, but to

thee the gods appoint this land of strangers for an abiding-place, and will give thee a goodly heritage therein. Go now forth of my sanctuary and thou shalt see a white heifer grazing by the wayside ; follow whither she goes, and in the place where she shall first lie down I bid thee build straightway a fenced city."

Then Cadmus, trusting in Apollo's word, went forth and followed that white heifer. Albeit it seemed to him a hard saying that he must build a fenced city, having for companions but a handful of slaves. Three days and nights the heifer led them slowly southward and eastward, and all the while they kept watch to see if she lay down when she paused to rest or browse, but she did not. Then came they into a valley of rich pastures, set about with wooded hills, and the heifer turned not aside into the pastures, but held straight on to a little hill that stood forth into the valley, between two streams, and on the top of that she lay down.

"Here, then," said Cadmus, "is the place where I must build my city, but first we will build an altar and sacrifice this heifer to the god at Delphi." So saying he began to pile up stones and sods of turf for an altar, and bade his slaves bring him wood for the fire and pure water to sprinkle the victim, as the manner was.

They had been gone but a brief while when Cadmus heard shrieks of anguish from a grove at the foot of the hill, and hurrying thither saw his men burst with blanched faces out of the dense underwood. "Fly, lord, fly!" they cried, "there is a dragon by the well yonder and he has slain two of us already! Away, away, or we are all dead men!"

But the prince drew his sword and flew to encounter the monster.

Now the well in the grove was a sacred fount of Ares, the War God, who had set to guard it the hugest of dragons, with coat of emerald scales and lidless fiery eyes that knew not sleep. And when the slaves approached the fount to draw water, that fell warder sprang from his lair and seized two, ere they could flee, with his devouring jaws. But swift vengeance did Cadmus take upon their slayer, for like lightning he rushed on the gorged monster and smote off his head with one blow of his good sword. Then was he 'ware of one that stood beside him in shining armour, of more than mortal stature, wearing a golden helm on her golden hair, and grasping a tall spear. It was the goddess Athena, who ever loves the brave.

"Well done, valiant prince!" she said. "I see

you are one of those who fear nought else because they fear the gods. Now shall you reap such harvest of this deed as never man did yet. Take the dragon's teeth and sow them broadcast on the ground."

The wondering prince obeyed, and no sooner had he done so than behold, ranks of armed men sprang from the teeth, as it were ranks of bristling corn from seed in the furrow, and they fought furiously one with another till all but seven were slain. Then Athena waved her spear, and those seven lowered their weapons and stood still.

"You have seen, Cadmus," said the goddess, "how mightily these champions overcame the rest, and that the strength of each is as the strength of ten who are born of woman. With the help of this dragon seed you shall build your city, and defend it from all adversaries, and from them in turn shall spring a race of doughty spearmen who will make the city of Cadmus renowned in war through ages yet to come."

With these words she departed, but Cadmus led the seven champions to the hill-top, and with them to aid he set about building the city, which in after-time was called the City of Thebes.

There my tale leaves him for awhile to tell of the Princess Europa. Swifter than ship can sail



ATHENA AND CADMUS
From an engraving after RUBENS



the white bull swam with her to the great island of Crete, and on that strange voyage the maiden felt no fear, for a sweet drowsiness stole over her, so that she closed her eyes in slumber. When she awoke she lay upon an unknown strand, under a clear heaven of stars, and a beautiful youth stood before her, whose golden raiment glittered in the starlight.

"Ah, prince," she cried, "where am I? And where is the bull that carried me hither?"

"You will see him no more, sweet Europa," answered the stranger youth, "for I am he. A powerful enchanter of this island slew the King, my father, and changed me by his wicked art into the form of a beast, never, he said, to quit it, until I could bring hither the fairest princess in the world. This I have done, and the spell is broken, as you see."

"Tell me your name," said the princess, casting down her eyes.

"I am called Asterios, the Star Prince," said he, "for the star Sirius waxed brighter when I was born, which sign the priests interpreted to foretell a life of wondrous splendour. But now, unless you can find it in your heart to pity me, I look my last on him with human eyes. Such was the enchanter's malice that he doomed me to

become a bull again for a thousand years, unless that fairest princess would straightway marry me."

"And if she would—what then?" asked Europa.

"Then," said Asterios, "there would be an end of that foul wizard. It is his fate to perish utterly if any of his victims can accomplish the task he sets them."

The princess rose up, and giving her hand to the Star Prince, "Lead home your bride, Asterios," she said, "for I am yours from this hour."

So there was great joy that night in the palace of the Star Prince, and those two were wedded with high pomp; but as for the enchanter he was never seen or heard of more.

King Asterios sent messengers with royal gifts to Europa's father, and when the old man heard their tidings he gave the kingdom of Phœnicia to his sons, and returned with the messengers to Crete, where he dwelt with his loved daughter till his death, joying in her splendid lot.

Ere long three noble sons were born to Queen Europa, of whom Minos, the eldest, became in after-time a king so wise and great that the King of gods himself deigned to take counsel with him, as with a familiar friend. And so it was rumoured in Crete that King Minos was the son of Zeus, who had carried away Europa in

the likeness of a bull, and wedded her in the likeness of Prince Asterios. But the truth is as I have told.

Now turn we again to Cadmus in his new-built city. It fell on a day that he went hunting in the hills, and gave chase to a huge, bristled boar of many winters, and the boar turned savagely at bay, the foam flying from his fearsome tusks. But Cadmus hurled his javelin at the charging beast with aim so true that it pierced bone and brain between the eyes, and he crashed to earth stone-dead. Then stepped quickly from the greenwood a lady divinely fair, crowned with fresh roses, and came to the young prince's side, and thanked him in sweetest tones because he had slain her deadly enemy. And he asked her who she was, and what feud she had with the boar.

"Sit on this mossy bank beside me," said the rose-crowned lady, "and I will tell you how much cause I have to hate him. In these hills a youth was once wont to hunt—Adonis was his name—whom both I and all who saw him loved for his flower-like beauty. Nay, there was no beast of the forest that would harm that lovely boy—till on a fatal day he roused yonder grey miscreant from his lair. That morn I had besought Adonis even with tears to forbear the chase, for my heart

was heavy with presage of misfortune ; but he would not heed, and parted from me laughing at my fears. Alas ! alas ! and when I saw him at eve, he lay cold and dead, bathed in the blood those cruel tusks had drawn from his tender side."

"Ah ! Lady," said Cadmus sighing, "would I might comfort you, but words are idle breath, and sorrow for the dead is without cure."

"Nay, gentle Prince," said she, "some comfort I have, and for your kindly wish you shall hear what it is. I who speak to you am Aphrodite, a goddess not without renown in earth and heaven, and at my prayer the awful Fates granted that my Adonis should come back to life each year with the coming of the flowers. All the dark winter he lies in breathless trance, housed within the secret chamber of my temple far away ; but all the time of roses we wander together wherever forest bowers are greenest and singing birds make sweetest music."

As she thus spoke Aphrodite's countenance took on rosier bloom, and she smiled with a tenderness divine. Then came a beating of wings among the tree-tops, and an ivory car floated to earth at her fleet, drawn by white doves. The goddess mounted the car, and, holding forth her

pearly hand to Cadmus, "Take this ring from my finger," she said, "in guerdon for what you have done. It will bring you the bride you have set your heart on, be she who she may."

"Cadmus took the ring, which was set with a great ruby, and forthwith the doves spread their pinions and soared aloft, bearing Aphrodite far into the blue. And the prince, having hung the ring about his neck by the golden chain he wore, because it was too small for his smallest finger, betook him home again.

Not many nights after, he sat feasting in his hall with those Seven Champions, sprung from the dragon's teeth, and they, who had taken themselves wives of the daughters of the land, began to say among themselves that it was full time their prince was wedded also. Presently one of them made bold to tell him so.

"That may be," said Cadmus; "but I have seen no maiden I desire for my bride. Nor am I like to, for a king's son should wed with king's blood, and there is never a princess in all this land." Then below his breath he said, "Could I have my wish it would be to wed a bride as fair as Aphrodite."

The whisper had scarce passed his lips when the door of the hall flew open and a white-robed

company entered with garlands and lighted torches, singing, as they came, a bridal song. In the midst walked a veiled maiden in glorious apparel, crowned with myrtle, and she that led her by the hand was none other than Aphrodite.

"You have put my gift to proof, Cadmus," said the goddess, smiling on the astonished prince; and not till then did he remember the ruby ring that he wore still about his neck. "I am come with these my kinsfolk," she continued, "to bestow on you the bride you wished for but now—a maiden fair as myself. Look on her face, and tell me if you can choose between us."

So saying, she threw back the maiden's veil, and Cadmus saw one who seemed the very twin of Aphrodite, save that she was in the earliest bloom of girlhood.

"Ah! brightest goddess," he cried, "what magic is this you have wrought? Surely I dream—there cannot be a maid so like you in earth or heaven."

"There is but one," answered Aphrodite, "and she is my child Harmonia, who stands before you. Come, take her by the hand, for this is no dream, but waking truth—and see, your guests wait beside the marriage-altar."

Cadmus looked around him, and still he

doubted if he were not dreaming. For his hall was become a trellised bower of roses and blossoming myrtle ; garlands of starry jasmine twined the rafters, and the purple broideries that decked the couches were hidden under showers of rose-petals and violets. Beside the hearth stood an altar of pure gold, heaped with burning frankincense, and amid the fragrant clouds that rose therefrom shone a crowd of divine faces. There Cadmus and his men beheld in their majesty the brother kings of Heaven and Sea, and the laurelled head of bright Apollo, and grey-eyed Athena, with golden helm, and Queen Hera, glorious bride of Zeus. Nor these alone ; but time would fail to tell of all that heavenly throng. Awestruck, the prince remained mute while Aphrodite placed her child's right hand in his, and led them to where Hera stood.

"Queen of Wedlock," she said, "I, who am Queen of Love, desire your blessing and favour for these two."

Then, as they bent before her, great Hera touched the forehead of bridegroom and bride with her golden sceptre, murmuring mystic words ; and she bade them plight their troth one to the other, calling to witness King Zeus and his Lady, and the household altar, and the hearth of

their homes ; which, when they had done, Apollo struck his glittering lyre, making joyous melody, and the Nine Sisters, whom men call the Muses, raised again the choral marriage song. Meanwhile the rest, mortals and immortals, were marshalled by Hermes, with his herald's staff, to their due places on the flower-strewn couches, where they feasted on all manner of delicious fare, from vessels of gold and crystal, which hands unseen set upon the tables. Then, having bestowed gifts upon the bride, the heavenly guests were gone from the hall, as suddenly as they had entered.

Such a wedding had Cadmus and Harmonia, and by Hera's grace they loved each other faithfully to their lives' end.

Now they reigned prosperously in Thebes for many years, and surpassing wealth was theirs, for the marriage gifts the gods brought to Aphrodite's child were golden coffers full of pearls and precious gems, the least of which might have been the captain jewel in a king's crown. And Cadmus saw the city he had built become mighty in the land, a city of mail-clad men valiant in war, who were sprung from the seed of the dragon. But for all this he did not escape the lot that comes to all of mortal birth. It is well said of

the wise that for every good a man receives at the hand of the gods he must likewise receive two evils. For this proved true even of him who wedded the daughter of a goddess and was called, with reason, the most fortunate of men.

Here Erato paused, and, turning to a blue-eyed sister who held a tambourine, she said—

“I have left my tale half-told, for I see sunrise will be here before I could make an end. But you, Terpsichore, can tell the rest on the Eighth Night, if you so choose.”

“It is for Orpheus to choose,” cried Terpsichore in a fresh and ringing voice. “How say, you, child? Will you hear what befell King Cadmus in his latter years, and of One born in Thebes, for whose sake I take joy in that story above all others?”

The boy eagerly murmured his assent as the moment of parting came, and on the Eighth Night Terpsichore took up the tale in these words :—

CHAPTER IX

THE GOD OF THE IVY CROWN

FULL twenty years did Cadmus reign and prosper after his wondrous bridal, and there was nothing lacking to his good fortune except that he had no son to inherit his kingdom. But Harmonia had borne him four daughters, the fairest princesses ever seen, the eldest of whom he had given in marriage to Echion, one of the Seven Champions who sprang from the dragon's teeth. And when a son was born to her, Cadmus made great rejoicings and said, "The gods have filled full my cup of bliss. Now shall I die happy, leaving a child of my own blood to sit upon my throne."

The name of this princess was Agave, and her son was called Pentheus. While he was yet a child, his father died, and Agave brought him to be reared in the palace of his grandsire, which proved the beginning of sorrows to that house, as you shall hear.

Now King Cadmus was a lion in war and a

terror to evildoers throughout the land, but to those of his own household he was mild even to a fault, and it was said of him in Thebes that he could rule a kingdom, but he could not rule his own daughters. The princess Agave was of a proud and turbulent spirit, without reverence for father or mother, and she now began to queen it in the palace, and to treat Cadmus with haughty disregard, as one already declined in years, who must soon make way for the prince her son. Her sisters Ino and Autonoe were but too ready to follow this ill example, so that their gentle mother was grieved to the soul, and dwelt in her chamber apart, rather than see the slights daily offered to her royal lord. No comfort then had Cadmus but in his youngest child Semele, a maiden as dutiful and tender-hearted as the others were selfish and unruly, and hated by them because of her surpassing beauty and because their father doated on her.

One day he said to her with a heavy sigh, "Ah, child, I would I could make a marriage for you with some gallant king's son, but I doubt your jealous sisters would not hear of it."

"Nay, my father," said Semele, "you would not surely have the heart to bid me leave you? That will I never do of my free will."

"I know it, best-beloved," answered Cadmus, "and yet I long to hold a son of yours in my arms before I die. For if that might be, I would proclaim him my heir before all Thebes, and no longer should Agave give command in my house because forsooth her child is to be king. Yes, then would be an end of this misrule, and I should see happy days again, and go to my grave in peace."

Semele thought much on these words, and that night when she lay down to rest in her maiden bower she prayed high Zeus to send her a son, that her father's troubles might have an end. Then straightway the King of gods appeared to her in his own shape, yet not in the fulness of his glory, which is too bright for mortal eyes to bear, and in gracious words he made himself known to her and promised that her prayer should be fulfilled in due season. Also he bade her keep silence about his visit to her until the child was born, which if she did he would reward her with what boon soever she desired of him.

Now at the time Zeus had appointed Semele brought forth a son as beautiful as the day, and she showed the babe to her father and told him the whole matter, and Cadmus gave thanks to the god with tears of joy. But when the

proud Agave heard of it she was filled with rage and envy, for well she knew that the son of Semele would be dearer to Cadmus than her own. As she hastened to take counsel with her sisters, she saw the slaves making ready a great feast in the palace hall, and asked them what it meant. "Our lord the King," they answered, "has bidden all the chief men of the city to feast with him and behold their new prince, whom he will proclaim his heir this night." So saying, the servants cast sly looks one at another and smiled askance, well pleased that their harsh mistress was discomfited. Then, enraged beyond measure, Agave flew to tell Ino and Autonoë the tidings, and when they were agreed what were best to say, they went all three before the King and his guests, and spoke a wicked slander against their sister. "Chieftains of Thebes," they cried, "will you suffer a base-born brat to be set over you instead of the son of noble Echion your kinsman? Know, though we are loth to speak our sister's shame, that she has wedded a peasant churl in secret, and now has she beguiled this doting old King with a monstrous tale indeed, pretending the babe she has borne to that vile serf came to her from Zeus on high."

At these words angry clamour broke out among the guests, and alas! while they questioned

and exclaimed, and the false sisters boldly urged their accusations, Cadmus stood irresolute and silent. He knew in his heart that Semele would never deceive him, yet when he tried to speak his faith in her, misgiving overcame him—could her marvellous tale indeed be true, or was she herself in some strange way deceived?

“My child has wedded no man in secret,” he cried at last to the three princesses. “How dare you say it? Where is your proof? You have none, or you would have betrayed the matter long ere this.”

“You wrong us, my father,” said Agave. “We have known it long, but pitying our sister we kept her secret while we could. As to proof, it is for her, not us to bring it. If Zeus indeed has wrought this miracle, let her ask him for a sign that we may believe.”

Now this seemed to the King a way to resolve his doubts, and he dismissed all present until the morrow, saying that then they should see how Zeus would bear witness to his daughter's truth. Then hastened he to Semele's bower, and for very shame told her not of her sisters' evil speaking, but only that neither they nor the Theban nobles would believe in the miracle, wherefore he bade her entreat a sign from Zeus on the morrow.

Semele kissed the babe within her arm and, smiling, said, "Fear not, my father ; all shall know to-morrow that my little son is in truth a gift from heaven. For King Zeus promised me a boon, and I will ask him this night for some sure token that he deigned to visit me."

So Cadmus left her to her rest, but she lay long awake musing what were best to ask.

Now there was an old nurse in the palace who dealt in witchcraft, and by her unlawful arts had knowledge of the customs of the gods in their heavenly mansions. This cunning crone now came to Semele in her bower, having received a rich bribe from Agave to spy out what she could. Softly she stepped to the bedside, and, seeing the princess awake, began to utter many flattering words in praise of her babe's beauty. "It is easily seen," she said, "that he is born to be a king, and king he will be, without doubt, if these stiff-necked Thebans can but be brought to believe your story, my sweet lady."

Then Semele, who thought no evil of man or woman, told of the boon Zeus had promised her, and how she meant to ask a sign that none could doubt. The witch turned pale, for she saw the princess spoke in all sincerity, and she thought, "Her tale was not feigned then, after all. To-

morrow the truth will appear and my mistress be utterly undone. Or worse—she will accuse me, to save herself, and swear 'twas I made her believe the slander she spoke. All is lost, unless I can devise something upon the instant.” But so swiftly worked her nimble brain that after scarce a minute’s pause she said, “Gracious princess, there is a thought that troubles me—what if he who visited you was not Zeus but some impious enchanter, who dared to play the part of a god? Such things have been, and there are wizards who can work even stranger marvels, to lure maidens to their undoing. I pray one of these may not have gifted you with the babe to make you his life-long thrall.’

The simple princess trembled when she heard these words of guile, for she knew the old woman to be wise concerning such matters, though she did not know of her witchcraft. “Good nurse,” she said, “give me some counsel. Is there no sign I can ask for, which would prove that he who came to me is very Zeus and no wizard?”

The crone was overjoyed to see how quickly Semele had fallen into her snare. “Surely, my child,” she answered in a wheedling tone; “do but ask him to enter your bower in that divine splendour he wears when he enters the golden

chamber of Hera his Queen. To counterfeit that glory is beyond the power of any mortal."

Semele thanked her, and was no sooner alone once more than she called upon Zeus to draw nigh, and the god appeared to her even as before. And she craved as the promised boon that he would enter her bower next noontide clothed in all the splendour with which he was wont to appear before his Queen.

"Semele," said he, with sad, compassionate look, "you know not what you ask; but, be it so, for the gods themselves are thralls to their spoken word." With that he was gone, and Semele, though her heart quaked to think what glory she must look upon, yet forgot fear for herself in joy that the giver of her babe would manifest his divinity in the sight of all.

Now the bower, which Cadmus had made to pleasure his darling, was a fair chamber standing by itself in a garden-court of the palace, built of cedar-wood, with wide casements of alabaster, and trellised over with a mantling vine.

When noon came the court around it was thronged with Thebans high and low, and with all the household of Cadmus, awaiting the expected sign, which the King had let proclaim would be the dazzling glory of Zeus, streaming forth from

the casements of the bower. None were bold enough (though many scoffed, and the three proud princesses among them) to approach the chamber closely, except the old nurse, who crept unmarked to the deep porch and crouched within it, her evil face distorted by fear. For well could she guess what would betide, yet a horrid craving to see the worst of it drew and chained her to the spot.

The shadow on the garden sundial had but just slid over the point of noon when a sudden cloud darkened the blue summer heaven ; a cloud that swooped downwards like a black-winged eagle and enfolded the bower as with huge murky pinions. Out of the cloud proceeded lightnings and thunderings and a voice more terrible than thunder. At the wordless sound thereof all that stood by fell on their faces and lay as dead. Deep silence followed ; trembling, they rose up at last and looked towards the bower. The cloud was gone, but now the noonday sun shone on the blackened ruins of that fair chamber. There, among charred remnants of its cedarn pillars and rafters, Semele was lying in the ashes of her couch, the only thing unscathed by the flames of the thunderbolt that yet smouldered at her feet. Peaceful she looked, like one asleep, but hers was

the sleep of death ; her gentle spirit had fled in the roar of the thunder that heralded the King of Gods descending with panoply of flame and cloud. Of her babe no trace could be found, and it was plain to all that he had been consumed to ashes. As for the old nurse, she was missed ere long, and great search was made for her by command of Agave ; but she was never seen again, for she was burnt to a cinder, as she well deserved.

After this Cadmus and Harmonia withdrew from their palace, broken with sorrow, and dwelt apart on the King's manor near the city, where they might nurse their grief unvexed by prying eyes. And Agave bore sway in Thebes until Pentheus, her son, was grown to manhood, when with consent of all the folk the now feeble and aged Cadmus declared him King in his stead.

Pentheus was by nature both brave and generous-hearted, but from his babyhood there was nothing his fond grandsire could deny him, and his mother in her pride had taught him to lord it over all who came near him, and even over herself. It was little wonder, then, that the young King could not endure the least crossing of his will, and were he thwarted in anything would fall into a rage so extreme that he was blind and deaf to warning and entreaty.

Now it came to pass, when Pentheus had reigned not long in the room of Cadmus, that the affairs of his kingdom took him on a journey to the borders of the Theban land ; and as he was returning word was brought him of strange doings in the city while he was absent. It seemed that a company of outlandish women had suddenly appeared there in fantastic guise and proclaimed themselves followers of a new god, calling on young and old to come from their homes and worship him upon the mountains. Their leader, so said the messengers, was a fair-faced youth with flowing ringlets like a girl, who gave himself out for the god's chosen servant, come from the far eastern land of Lydia to bring his sacred rites to Thebes, his birthplace. For, strangest of all, these outlanders declared that their god, whom they called Bacchus, was none other than the child of Semele—that very babe who perished with his hapless mother a full score years ago !

The King frowned darkly at these tidings, and the messengers scarce found courage to tell him that worse remained to hear. But he bade them say on, and falteringly they told how the Queen-mother and her sisters and all the women-folk of Thebes were seized with a frenzy as they

listened to that Lydian Stranger, and followed him with exulting cries, bounding like deer, to the heights of Mount Cithaeron nigh the city. There all night long they had kept revel, for the sound of drums and cymbals had reached the watchmen in the city, and torchlights had been seen flitting to and fro among the distant woods.

An angry man was King Pentheus as he hastened homewards, and the sight that met him at his palace gates angered him yet more. The band of stranger women were gathered there in such array as he had never seen ; their dark streaming tresses were crowned with ivy, intertwined with parti-coloured headbands of barbaric fashion ; dappled fawnskins were flung over the tunics that fell to their bare feet, and they carried light wands swathed with ivy and tipped with fir-cones. As the King approached them the women began to circle round him in a swaying dance, chanting the while some refrain in their unknown tongue, and as they danced some waved their wands, others beat upon tambourines or made dinning music with silver cymbals. Pentheus turned to bid his guards seize upon these impudent strangers, but at that moment two figures met his gaze that turned his wrath elsewhere. Cadmus, his grandsire, and the blind old Teiresias, Apollo's

priest and seer, were passing with the slow steps of age to the city gate that looked towards Mount Cithaeron, and both were accoutred in every point like the stranger women. Ivy wreathed the grey locks of Cadmus and the white woollen chaplet of the priest; each was decked with the fawnskin; each walked unshod and waved a garlanded wand instead of leaning on a staff. Teiresias, moreover, who was ever wont to be led by a boy, now paced along unguided, like one who sees clearly whither he is bound. The young King strode before the pair and with an indignant look. "Father of my mother," he cried, "why do you thus dishonour your grey hairs? Fling off those shameful trappings, I implore you. What! can you not have heard that this pretended new god is—I blush to say it—the child Zeus destroyed with Semele in punishment of her impious boast that it came from him? Have you no care for our good name that you join in blazoning abroad that half-forgotten shame of our house?" Then, turning to Teiresias, he exclaimed fiercely, "As for you, old soothsayer, I see you are no better than the rest of your greedy, lying tribe. Well may you hail this false god—the more new altars, the richer will be your harvest of golden rewards for divining at the sacrifices."

“Foolhardy King,” answered the seer calmly, “rein your tongue, lest it do you a mischief. The god I serve, even Apollo who cannot lie, has revealed to me that Semele’s babe did not perish, but was caught up to heaven, whence he came, by the hand of Zeus. There, though born of a mortal mother, he was received into the company of the Immortals, and they made him like unto themselves, bathing his tender body in their divine nectar and nourishing him with ambrosia. Thus has he become the youngest of the gods, and is the delight of them all for his beauty, and being now come to the flower of his youth, it is the will of Zeus that he shall be the delight of men also, and all nations shall do him service. Already his glory has shone forth in the lands of the sunrise, but he was fain to behold the place of his birth, and bless his own Theban folk. Therefore is he come hither, and now, O Pentheus, be warned in time, if you love your life. Rebel not against the Power that is come among us ; lay no hand on these women, nor on any who seek to honour Bacchus in his appointed way ; for he will mightily avenge his servants. Beware, I say, lest in the blindness of your heart you rush upon the doom of those who fight against the gods.”

But Pentheus waxed only the more wroth at

these words of warning. "Insolent dotard," he thundered, "do you threaten your King? Did not holy Apollo's badge protect your head, I would strike it from your shoulders! Begone with this crazed old sire whom you have made your tool. But you shall pay me for your words," he added, as Teiresias drew Cadmus away. "Guards! go, some of you, and hew in pieces the seer's seat in the grove, where he loves to sit listening to the birds—aha! that will cut him to the heart. Tear down his shady bower, trample his flowers to dust; he shall hear no more soothsay from his feathered brothers there! And do the rest of you speed to Cithaeron and seize the mad women at their revels. Above all, see that the Lydian Stranger escape you not, for the vile cheat shall die the death he deserves."

So saying, the King darted a scornful glance at the retreating form of Teiresias, and passed hastily within the palace.

Meanwhile the stranger women had cowered in frightened silence on the steps of the doorway, where they now huddled closer together and began to croon a low lament. But presently they raised so loud a cry of surprise and grief that Pentheus came hurrying forth to see the cause. There, between two of his guards, stood the Lydian

Stranger, his hands bound behind his back, a smile on his fair, delicate face. He, too, wore the fawnskin and ivy crown, and with his long robe and clustering curls might have seemed a maiden in her flower but for his tall stature and something majestic in his mien.

"Lord King," said one of the guards, "this is the youth you bade us make prisoner. An easy task it was, for we found him not far off, and he neither strove nor spoke, but patiently suffered us to bind him."

"Loose him now," said Pentheus, scanning the youth sternly; "we have the deceiver safe enough without bonds, cunning though he be." And when this was done, "Whence are you, Stranger?" he demanded haughtily.

"I am from Lydia," answered the Stranger, bending his calm gaze full on the frowning King.

"And what make you here?" said Pentheus again. "What rites are they that you pretend to celebrate with the help of women driven frantic by your mummeries?"

"They are the mystic rites of Bacchus," said the Stranger, "and not to be spoken of to ears profane. But great are the joys that wait for such as approach them with pure hearts and hands."

“Ay,” scoffed the King, “so is it you shuffle off a question you cannot answer. Here is another. This Bacchus of yours—you have doubtless seen him—in what form did he appear?”

“His form,” said the Stranger slowly, “was . . . such as it pleased him to take.”

“Enough of this,” cried Pentheus roughly. “I see you do but palter with me. Now hear plain truth for once. I tell you there is no such god; the child Semele bore has been dust these many years; look yonder, and behold that witness to his doom and hers! Yonder the bolt of Zeus slew them both.”

He pointed to the courtyard where the bower of Semele had stood; its scattered ruins were now hidden under masses of creeping ivy, and in the midst a white stone marked her tomb. For there Cadmus had buried her, according to the custom of the land that the lightning-smitten should be buried where they fell and the spot remain untrodden for ever. So an enclosure fenced the tomb, and it was bare of garlands or offerings, but the charred vine had sprung again from its roots and wreathed the stone with its tender green. At the grave's foot, a flicker of dull flame playing over the ivy showed where the thunderbolt had never ceased to smoulder. The Stranger looked

earnestly upon the place. "Cadmus did well," he murmured, "to fence that holy ground." Calmly then he asked the King why he had made him prisoner.

"To give you the reward such impostors earn," said Pentheus grimly, "when I have bethought me of torments rare enough. But first I will crop those dainty love-locks, and spoil the girlish beauty you are so proud of, and cast you, fettered, into a darksome lodging, there to hold revel in your god's honour as best you may."

"He will set me free," said the Stranger quietly, "when I call upon him."

"Say, rather, when you call once more among your crew on the hillside," said Pentheus with a taunting smile.

"Nay," answered the other, "trow you Bacchus hears us not even now? O King, he is very nigh unto you; were your eyes not holden because of your stubborn pride, you would see him standing where I stand . . ."

"Away with this fellow!" cried the furious King; "he mocks me to my face. Bind him in chains and tether him like a beast in the dark, lockfast cell hard by the stalls of my horses. Bind these women, too—no, they are but frightened sheep now their leader is taken; let them bide

here till I have leisure to set them drudging as slaves at the loom or the mill."

The Stranger turned his head, as the guards led him within, and, in a new tone of command, said, "Touch them not, Pentheus, nor dare to enslave those whose master is the god alone. Once for all, I bid you beware of violence to them or to me, for whatsoever wrong is done to a servant of Bacchus is done unto himself."

At this Pentheus stood for a moment as though struck dumb with rage or fear, but swiftly recovering himself he hurried after his prisoner, uttering dreadful menaces. Left alone once more, the women broke out into shrill lamentation over their leader's cruel bondage, mingled with prayers to Bacchus to take speedy vengeance on the tyrant. Suddenly the flickering flame at the tomb of Semele leapt up into a ruddy blaze, and a rumble of earthquake spread from that spot till the whole palace tottered on its foundations, and deep cracks showed in its marble frontal. At the same instant a loud, thrilling voice called from within it: "Handmaids of Bacchus! Handmaids of Bacchus!"

"Who calls?" shrieked the panic-stricken women.

"It is I," replied the voice, "Bacchus, son of Semele."

Then, crying out that the God was come indeed, and would utterly overthrow that guilty house, they flung themselves on their faces, nor durst look up. But no rending crash followed; the ground ceased to tremble, the leaping flame died down; and now it was the familiar voice of their leader that sounded close at hand, bidding them be of good courage. With cries of joy the Handmaids of Bacchus sprang up and beheld him free of bonds, unscathed, smiling, and eagerly they asked him how he had broken his prison.

And thus he told them the tale:—

“The King’s guards had led me as far as the stables, close to my place of durance, when he came up with us, in savage mood, and bade them give him the chains, for he would bind me with his own hands, while they went forth to help bring back the prisoners from Cithaeron. So they left us together, and by some strange whim Pentheus dragged me into a stall of the stables, and I saw a bull tethered there. Straightway he seemed to forget my presence, and fell to binding the chains about the bull’s forelegs, and the creature plunged to and fro, so that the King struggled with it vainly, panting and gnashing his teeth, till he was out of breath. But I meanwhile sat by full quietly and . . . fixed my eyes

on him. Thereupon did Bacchus send the earthquake and kindled the blaze at his mother's tomb; that sudden glare lit up all the palace, and Pentheus rushed from the stable crying, 'Bring water, slaves! The house is burning!' And all ran hither and thither, seeking the fire, till the glare died away. Then Pentheus saw I stood beside him, and he made at me with drawn sword; but Bacchus sent a phantom like myself before his eyes—so at least I guess, for I saw nought—which he pursued from chamber to chamber, hewing and stabbing at empty air. At last he sank to the ground, spent with weariness, and thus I left him, but not for long, as I think—— Hark! I hear his quick footfall even now."

Forth rushed the King as he spoke, and shouted aloud, "There is treachery here! The prisoner I myself bound fast is loosed, and has escaped out of my sight." Haggard was his look, his array disordered; his drawn sword shook in his grasp as he paused and glanced wildly about him. "Ah!" he cried, his eye lighting on the Stranger, "I have him now," and he sprang forward, brandishing the sword. Unflinching stood the Stranger, and quietly said, "Halt, Pentheus! Put up your sword

into its sheath. Turn and hear what yonder messenger has to tell you."

Like one in a dream, the King obeyed, and as the Stranger waved his hand he started as though suddenly awakened, and beheld a man running towards them at headlong speed. It was a herdsman, dusty, breathless, crimson, and he panted out that he had run a race for his life from Mount Cithaeron. To the King's impatient questioning he made answer little by little that he and his fellows had chanced on Agave and others of the women sleeping in a glen; they had thought to capture her, and so win favour with the King; but the lowing of their oxen roused the sleepers, who flew like mad things upon the herdsmen, screaming, "We are betrayed!" And the men could not stand before their wild onrush, but fled, with halloos for help, hearing which the King's guards made up to the rescue, and surrounded the herd of women, thinking to drive them home. But those shrieking Furies broke through the ring of weapons as though swords were straws and lances reeds; and at the touch of their light wands bucklers were shivered in pieces and strong men went down like grass before the scythe. It was but a moment or two before that fray turned to a rout.

"Flesh and blood we could fight, my King," said the herdsman, "but the power we fled from is more than mortal. These Handmaids of Bacchus are certainly possessed of some god—they pursued us like raging lions, and I fear me I have escaped alone to tell the tale."

"It seems my men are turned women and my women men," said the King angrily ; "but I will stamp out this madness like a firebrand, before it set all my kingdom aflame. Go warn my captains, bid them call all the men of Thebes to arms with sound of trumpet, and say I myself will lead the levy to Cithaeron."

"That will avail you nothing, Pentheus," said the Stranger, "for your host will return in shameful flight from a lost battle. Bacchus will not suffer a thousand to prevail against his chosen, nay, ten thousand shall flee before them. For the last time I warn you, I entreat you, strive with him no more ; why will you kick against the pricks? Come, let there be peace between us ; bid *me* bring your womenfolk home again, and I will lead them back to Thebes meek as any lambs."

"Silence, miserable trickster," answered Pentheus ; "you will not cozen me into letting you out of my sight. Ho ! my men within ! Bring me my arms !"

"Ah!" said the Stranger, with a long, shuddering sigh, and suddenly stepping close to the King he looked him fixedly in the eyes. "Shall not you and I," he murmured softly, "go and steal upon the women at their revels—now?"

"I—I greatly desire to see what it is they do," said Pentheus in a dreamy voice. "Besides," he went on, after a pause, "it would be a fine stratagem to spy out their lurking-place, then let my army come on them unawares."

"Excellently thought on," said the Stranger. "I will guide you to the very spot, and you will see things . . . worth the seeing. But you must go disguised, for if they catch sight of you in your own garb it will mar all. Come within, and I will array you at all points like myself, so that you will seem a true follower of the god."

"But you are robed like these women here," said the King hesitatingly. "I cannot for shame don a woman's garb."

"It were greater shame to be slain in warrior-garb by women," replied the other, "as you will be if they see you thus."

"True," muttered the King, "let us go in. . . . Yes, you shall lead me to spy them out. . . .

I will be wary and lie close . . . but I am not sure, after all, that I will let you disguise me."

"He will *not* let me while he keeps his right mind," said the Stranger, as Pentheus disappeared within, "and yet, Handmaids of Bacchus, you shall presently see our oppressor right proud of those same trappings he scorned erewhile." And with that he followed after the King.

None saw or heard what passed between those two, nor will it ever be known, save of One, how the mind of Pentheus was wrought upon to overpass that brink of madness where it had hovered since the Servant of Bacchus entered his house a captive. This much alone is certain ; in a brief while he came forth for the last time from his palace doors, flaunting ivy crown and ivied wand, and habited in all points like the Lydian Stranger, with whom he was eagerly conversing. There was an uncanny gleam in his rolling eyeballs. He tossed his head backwards and forwards with short, jerking movements, as of a wild thing caught in the hunter's toils, and reeled dizzily in his gait.

"How say you, my guide," he said, speaking thick and fast, "might I not pass for a daughter of old Cadmus ? Sits my garland awry ? I pray you bind up this straying curl, and tell me, must

I hold my wand thus—or thus? Strange, how mine eyes dazzle! Methinks I see two suns in the heavens . . . and twin towers to my palace, that had but one . . . and you, friend, what ails you, that you change your shape and grow those sprouting horns? I took you for a man, but sure my sight misled me, you are so evidently a bull. . . . Lead on, lead on to Cithaeron! I feel such strength in every limb that I shall pluck up the mountain by the roots and send it spinning skywards, and all the crew of Bacchus along with it!”

To these wild words the Stranger gave replies so low that they were drowned in the King's loud gabbling utterance, but as he led him swiftly towards the city gate he turned and said aloud—

“Look your last, Handmaids of Bacchus, on one who is hastening to his doom. As a beast of the chase is driven towards the pitfall, so goes Pentheus where the net is spread and the huntresses are gathered together.”

Now, there is on the flank of Cithaeron a rock-girt glen, narrow and deep, watered by clear, cold rivulets that come leaping down its sheer sides, and roofed with overhanging pines. On the edge of this ravine the Stranger stood with Pentheus

as the sun was drawing westward, and bade him look downward through the dark-green layers of shade. Far below, on the pine-needed floor of the glen, three bands of women were couched asleep—but how unlike the frenzied company he had thought to behold! This was no revel-rout, sprawling in wild disarray where they had fallen into exhausted slumber; rather it seemed a procession of maids and matrons bound for some solemn festival were peacefully reclining in those ordered ranks, with trim-garlanded heads demurely pillowed on their arms and robes folded discreetly.

As Pentheus gazed, the sleepers stirred and wakened, and he heard his mother's voice calling, "Up, Sisters! Up, Handmaids of Bacchus! Burning noon is past; come, let us refresh ourselves after our slumber." With that, all sprang lightly up, and while some culled the running waters in their palms, others let down their wands into the soft dry soil—and lo! from those hollow stems welled up streams of milk, or honey, or purple wine, so that each drank her fill of what she would. And Pentheus saw that some were fondling young fawns, others young mountain pards in their laps, and fed them also from the jets of milk.

"This is a strange magic," he whispered to his

guide. "I would fain view it more clearly—these interlacing boughs hinder my discerning what sinful spells they are plying, foul witches that they are!"

"Would you pry into iniquity?" said the Stranger sternly.

"Why else am I come?" said the King with a cunning look. "I guessed they worked their wonders by evil witchcraft and now I know it."

"Nay, then," returned the Stranger, "you shall both see and . . . be seen."

As he said the words his form swelled and towered to a height more than human; with one hand he grasped by the top a tall silver fir, bending it gently, gently, as a man bends a bow, until its tasselled head touched the ground, and with the other he set Pentheus astride one of the topmost branches. Heedfully then he let the bowed stem rise between his fingers until it stood upright again, bearing the King safe perched aloft. And suddenly earth and air seemed all aflame with a white fire that yet scorched not where it fell, for therein the trees and greensward of the glen showed luminous but unconsumed. When that blinding radiance died away the Stranger was gone, but a great voice cried from the upper blue, "Arise, arise, Handmaids of

Bacchus! See yonder the despiser of our holy mysteries! Arise, arise, for the hunt is up and the prey is delivered into your hands!"

Then rang the glen with the shrill voices of women mimicking the halloo of huntsmen, ay, and the baying of hounds, as the whole troop surged hither and thither, rolling their eyes wildly round in search of the quarry. It was Agave who first marked the King's dappled fawnskin high among the fir-boughs, and led the maddened throng who swarmed about the tree uttering cries of savage exultation. With a strength not of earth those white tossing arms were flung round its trunk and lower branches—vainly, it seemed awhile, as waves beat on a tower of granite, but slowly the tall fir began to sway and totter, slowly its roots yielded, and under the dragging grip of a hundred hands it crashed earthward at last, bringing its hapless freight along with it. As hounds close in upon the deer, so the Handmaids of Bacchus flew upon Pentheus, and as the deer's death so was his.

The shades of evening were gathering over Thebes when Cadmus and Teiresias returned from their pilgrimage, weary but full of peace, such things had their hearts been opened to understand among the silent places of the hills.

For there, though they had met neither the votaries of Bacchus nor himself in visible shape, they were made aware of a Presence haunting the solitude, and felt that it was not awful but benign. There to blind seer and aged King as they waited, humbly patient, for a sign or message, came the sense that this Presence was everywhere in the world, one power of many forms and names. It was in the springing sap that flushed the woodlands with green, in the bounding pulses of the wild things, in the juice of the grape that makes glad the heart of man; it was one with the joy of youth and the pride of life and the ecstasy of the lover and the bard.

“We must return to the palace,” said Cadmus as they neared the city gate. “I must plead with Pentheus ere it is too late, for now I have received this new knowledge it will surely be given me to speak not in vain of the things that belong unto his peace.”

So they came together to the palace. But as they reached it they were overtaken by four of the King’s guards, who bore amongst them a rude litter of green boughs, heaped over with leaves. These men wept as they came, and when they saw Cadmus they set down the litter at his feet and beat their breasts, bewailing that they

had lived to see that day. Cadmus had but just parted the leaves with trembling hand and seen what lay beneath, when his daughter Agave came towards him with a dancing step and triumph in her mien. "Ah, Father," she cried, "you shall be proud of me now! Yon lion our men have carried hither—'twas I that slew him on Cithaeron; we will have his head set for a trophy above the portal that all Thebes may see how royal a quarry Agave brought home from her hunting. But I must hasten within—I long to rejoice my Pentheus with the tidings of his mother's prowess."

So saying, she passed from sight, but Cadmus sank down beside the litter and covered his face in silence.

Then said Teiresias, "The wages of her sin are paid unto Agave this day, even with the measure that she has meted withal. Because she spared not her own sister, but through her false witness caused Semele to die untimely, therefore this doom has come upon her, that she should destroy her son in the flower of his age. Because she revered not father or mother, but made their lives bitter unto them till they were fain to depart from their home, therefore must she go forth into banishment with the sisters who followed her in evil-doing. But to thee, Cadmus, when

thou hast buried this hope of thine old age, the Son of Semele will grant release from the load of years and sorrows. Yea, and he bids thee take comfort, by the token of the ivy that is his chosen crown; for as its leaf abides in killing frost, so through wintry death his sweet mother passed unchanged into bliss that fadeth not away."

Now, as the blind seer foretold, thus it befell to Cadmus and to his wife also. For in pity of their desolate age the God of the Ivy Crown changed them into other forms, wherein they remember no more their first sad life, and placed them safely among the hills of green Illyria, beside the western sea.

"And there, they say, two bright and agéd snakes,
Who once were Cadmus and Harmonia,
Bask in the glens, or on the warm sea-shore,
In breathless quiet, after all their ills."

CHAPTER X

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

THE forest was awakening from its winter sleep and already the air was sweet with the first faint balms of spring, when Orpheus watched the Ninth moon rise full-orbed, and knew that he was now to hear the last story told beside the Enchanted Well.

Calliope would tell it, she who seemed to love him the most of all the gracious sisters, and he fell asleep with the thought that she should choose the tale for him, because she had said at first that they each had their favourite.

He awoke to see her bending over him with a face of radiant joy; it seemed she had just stepped from the circle of her sisters, who were dancing hand in hand, their voices ringing with such notes of gladness as the world hears never now but in the skylark's carol. "The spring is coming," murmured the boy, still scarce awake, "and all

the birds are singing because they know it—is that why you look so glad, dearest Lady? ”

Then all the Nine gathered about him with happy laughter, and Calliope said, “Spring is coming indeed, and the woods are full of her harbingers, but sweeter tidings yet are abroad on earth this night—Prometheus is set free! ”

“And now, sister,” said Thalia, “it needs not to ask what story Orpheus will have you tell, for here is the very one Melpomene promised he should hear before he left us, and I see he longs for you to begin.”

Calliope met the child’s eager look with a smile, and answered, “I must begin, then, where Melpomene’s story ended, that he may understand how this great thing has come to pass.”

THE cry that broke from Prometheus, when in the first hour of his bondage he called on the Powers of Earth and Air and Sea to bear witness against the ingrate Zeus, rolled far beyond the icy bounds of his prison and echoed round the world like a moaning wave. At the voice of the great Titan’s anguish Earth shuddered to her depths, yet she answered not, for she had no comfort to give her son ; but there were those in the cool, glassy halls of Ocean whom the sound reached not in vain. For the gentle Ocean nymphs hovered

up out of the deep, charioted in fairy shells, and softly they came sliding through middle air to the heights of Caucasus. Then they stayed their cars of translucent pearl, and Prometheus was 'ware of a divine fragrance as the nymphs floated downwards to his feet, wafting the scents of the sea from their amber tresses and robes of palest green. "We have heard," they sang, "we have heard thy call, Prometheus, in our coral-paven bowers. Frail are we as the foam-bells, powerless to aid thee; yet we have hastened hither to mourn with thee awhile, if haply the dew of tears may bring thee some poor balm."

"Weep not for me, beautiful children of Ocean," answered the Titan, "it is enough that I hear your gentle voices and feel that I am not all unpitied nor utterly forsaken. But see, what other visitant wings his way to us—a mighty gryphon; and who is this that lights down from the feathered steed? Can it be my voice has roused your ancient sire from slumber in his dim unfathomed caves?"

It was in truth old Ocean who stood before them, his hoar and oozy locks crowned with gold, a sceptre of emerald in his hand.

"Prometheus," he said, in deep hollow tones, "compassion for a kinsman's woes has brought

me on this far journey from Earth's western shores. Not unmindful of the tie that binds thee and me as offspring of the All Mother, I come to bring thee what help I may in this evil case."

"Thou canst not help me," replied Prometheus, "none the less, I praise thy kindness, aged King, and yield thee all thanks for that good intent."

"Nay," said the other, "there is no plight so desperate but it may be bettered by sage counsel. Now hear me, Titan ; I am one that reverences sovran law and right supremacy, knowing that as my waves have their appointed bounds, and flowers their seasons and the stars their changeless courses, so all things must own obedience to the power set over them. But thou in thy overweening pride hast defied and broken the law of our suzerain, under whom all we of immortal race wear our crowns and wield our lesser sceptres, and for this hath he justly condemned thee to suffer. I bewail thy punishment, but I acknowledge it is merited at his hands. Do thou likewise acknowledge it, and make humble submission to Zeus, and I myself will be thine intercessor with him ; nor doubt I to obtain his gracious pardon, when he shall hear thou art penitent."

"Trouble not thyself," said Prometheus, with

a bitter smile. "The way is long to his abode, and thine old limbs will be wearied."

"I reckon not of that," said Ocean, "no faint-hearted friend am I."

"That is well seen, for you brave much peril if you plead for a rebel," answered the Titan.

"Zeus will pay due honour to my age and dignity," said the old King proudly, but there came a quaver in his voice.

"Be not too sure of that," said Prometheus, "for a young tyrant laughs at ancient rights. Have a care he do not punish *thy* rashness . . . as he has punished mine."

"Still hast thou forethought for others, rather than thyself," retorted the other; "it seems then, I shall earn no thanks of thee if I go this errand."

"Deem me not thankless, eldest of the gods," said Prometheus more gently, "but it avails not to talk of pardon which Zeus will no more give than I would take. I pray thee, look to thine own safety, and get thee home ere his jealous eye mark our converse. I would not that any should suffer for my sake. Are the woes not enough that the tyrants has brought already upon our kindred? Wilt thou stand like Atlas, with head and shoulders bowed for ever under the burden of

the massy firmament—or like Enceladus, lie crushed beneath the weight of Etna? Alas! the pangs of these my brethren rend my heart more cruelly than aught I must myself endure.”

“I go, Prometheus, seeing that I cannot prevail with thee,” said old Ocean sorrowfully, and so saying he mounted his gryphon steed and went his way.

But the nymphs followed not their sire, although the Titan bade them beware of lingering, lest Zeus should make them rue their pity for his foe. “We are things too slight and weak to rouse his anger,” they said, “as well might he launch his thunderbolts at the tiny fleets of the nautilus, or sea-flowers drifting on the waves. Here will we stay till nightfall, and while the slow hours away with talk and song. Tell us, great Titan, would it not ease thine heart a little to speak of the things thou hast done for the good of man? It is but broken rumours of them that have reached our far home, and we long to know the whole.”

Well had the Ocean maidens divined the thought that alone brought solace to Prometheus, and earnestly they listened while he unfolded all the story of the race of clay, and how for their sakes he had taken by stealth the forbidden fire, by means whereof they were become masters of life-fostering arts innumerable. He

told also of the hatred of Zeus to that race from the beginning, because they had worshipped Cronos, and how he revenged on them the theft of fire, by the making of Pandora. And when he ended the tale, the wondering Ocean nymphs lifted up their voices and thus they sang : "How terrible is Zeus in his wrath, and how marvellous is his power ! All that his deep mind devises he brings straightway to pass, without toil, without the lifting of his hand, for he speaks the word and it is done. Surely there is none like him among gods that have been or will be ; the cunning of Cronos prevailed not against him, neither the might of the Titan brethren, nor Prometheus the all-wise. Of an ancient house are we, and love not what is new ; but we see that with Zeus none may strive, for he is become lord over all, and the former things are passed away."

Then said Prometheus, "Nevertheless a day is coming when this Zeus shall be humble, who is now so tyrannous of soul. Such a marriage will he compass for himself as shall work his downfall, and the high places of the heavens shall know him no more. That doom none among the Immortals can avert save I myself, who know what marriage it is which must bring him low ; ay, and I know what manner of adversary it shall raise up for him,

even one armed with a mightier weapon than the thunderbolt, who shall hurl the usurper from the ancient throne of Cronos to dwell in nether darkness for ever. Let Zeus triumph, then, while he may ; let him exult over my torments and boast himself all-conquering ; brief shall be the day of his dominion, and when that is past he shall no more laugh but weep. Yea, then shall he learn how widely sundered are the lots of ruler and slave."

The daughters of Ocean heard these words with trembling, and made answer, "Alas, Prometheus, will nought curb thy haughty spirit? Refrain thy tongue, we beseech thee, lest Zeus hear these menaces and they add fuel to the fire of his wrath. What boots it to threaten him in whose power thou liest thus helpless?"

"'Be it yours to pay him lip-service,' said Prometheus in a tone half tender, half disdainful ; 'for to all of female mould Might is ever Right. But to me, knowing what I know, Zeus and all that he can do are as dust in the balance. Slay me he cannot, and the worst he can inflict on one immortal you behold, methinks, already. Ah ! Who comes now ? It is the young Hermes, his messenger, sent doubtless to learn the import of what Zeus has overheard.'

Even as he spoke the golden-sandalled Herald of Zeus alighted at his feet and stood poised on tiptoe, waving his wand of office. "Hear, thou Fire-stealer!" he cried, "the King of Gods bids thee declare straightway what marriage it is that threatens him with peril. Speak plainly, thou wert best; Zeus loves not riddles nor those that deal in them."

"Insolent hireling," answered the Titan, "well dost thou ape the pompous bluster of thine upstart lord, as is ever the wont of thy kind. Go, tell the new-made tyrant that I set him at defiance; no outrage shall wring from my lips the word that would save him, and never will he learn the secret until his own hand frees Prometheus from these bonds. Is this plain enough to please him? Begone, then, with thine answer, for I waste not more words on servile ears."

"Dearly shalt thou pay for those thou hast now uttered, bold rebel," said Hermes, the hot colour mounting to his brow, and with that he turned him to the nymphs and curtly bade them flee upon the instant, lest the imminent doom of Prometheus should overtake them also. But the children of Ocean only gathered closer about the Titan, and fearlessly the eldest made reply:—

“Hermes, thou dost not counsel well. That be far from us, to forsake our friend in his dark hour. Rather will we share whatever doom Zeus sends him than play so base a part ; and do thou hold thy peace, for never wilt thou persuade us thereto. Nought have we in such abhorrence as disloyalty of soul.”

Thereat Hermes took his upward way with the speed of an arrow, and scarcely was he lost to sight when darkness covered the noonday sky, and thunder, peal on peal, rolled among the crags, answered from underground by the hollow roar that bodes the earthquake. Deeper grew the gloom, until the lightning flashes showed but as flaming rifts in a wall of solid blackness, and now the earth shook with horrible upheaval and louder than any thunder came the crash of falling precipices. Terror locked the lips of the Ocean maidens ; dizzily they clung together and strained their eyes in vain for a last sight of Prometheus ; it seemed he must be so close beside them . . . and yet they heard his voice as from a distance uplifted in agonised entreaty. But not to his tormentor ; the name of Zeus mingled not with that prayer ; it was on the name of Earth, the Mother and Consoler—Earth who takes at last all sufferers to her bosom, that her son called out

of the horror of great darkness. And then all was still ; tempest and earthquake had done their work and with their passing light dawned again, revealing the changes they had wrought upon the face of the mountains. Gone was the glen of rocks ; a mighty chasm had yawned at the very feet of the Ocean nymphs, dividing them from the chained Titan ; and the spot whereon they stood was now a pinnacle of the hills, whence they could barely descry a form they knew for his, swinging, it seemed, from the ledge of a vast cliff that rose sheer from the further side of the gulf. Even as they looked, an eagle swooped with famished scream upon that writhing figure ; more they endured not to behold, but fled, sickened at heart, to the sheltering deeps.

The suns of a thousand years had risen and set ere those untrodden peaks saw other visitants than the insatiable wingéd Hound of Zeus, for ever haunting his immortal prey. Then, in the destined hour, came one not borne on aëry car, but toiling sturdily upwards ; no heaven-dweller, but a child of man. This traveller had a lion-skin girt about his stalwart body, and a quiver slung from his shoulders, and he carried a mighty bow. No sooner marked he the eagle, where it circled slowly in air above Prometheus, than

he launched an arrow from the bowstring with the full strength of his sinewy arms, and so true an aim, that the shaft flew a league and more straight to the eagle's heart. The great bird fell as falls a stone into the chasm below ; and the archer pressed forward till by dint of clambering he stood beside it, and gazed awestruck on the face of the cliff and him that hung there in chains.

"I know thee, Heracles," said the deep voice of the prisoner, "thou wanderer by land and sea, thou strong tower of those that suffer wrong. Much hast thou deserved of man, and now thy great heart has brought thee by perilous ways to succour the Immortal whose woes are sung and told in every land. But though thou hast slain the eagle that preyed upon my heart, thou canst not deliver me from these bonds."

"All-wise Prometheus," answered Heracles, "it is not hidden from thee that Zeus himself is beholden to me for a service I did him, when he and his warred of late with the Earth-born Giants, and an oracle foretold that the gods should not prevail without help of a mortal. With these arrows I slew Alcyoneus, hugest of their foes, and for that Zeus has promised to hear every prayer of mine with favour. Now will I ask him

to show thee—nay, not mercy, for that is for cravens—but justice.”

Then did Zeus vouchsafe that Heracles should plead the cause of Prometheus in full assembly of the gods; and he called Themis, daughter of Earth, to be judge between himself and the Titan, forasmuch as that goddess is the guardian of the everlasting laws of righteousness. Now when both Zeus and Heracles had spoken, Themis gave this sentence from the judgment seat: “Prometheus can never make full satisfaction for his transgression, seeing that he is by nature immortal, and nought but death can atone for the breaking of a law made in heaven. Neither can any mortal pay that price for him, because the life of a mortal is not his own, but forfeit to death when his little race is run. But if one who is immortal by gift of the gods and not by birthright, will freely yield up his immortality, he it is, and he alone, who may die in the stead of Prometheus.”

When they heard this, all the gods were very sorrowful, for it seemed to them a thing impossible that any in earth or heaven should renounce the gift of immortality. But Heracles betook him to a great and wooded mountain that is called Pelion, and sought out Chiron the Centaur. Now the Centaurs are a folk of double



HERCULES SLAYING THE HYDRA

nature, having the form of a man down to the middle, and the form of a horse below, and a wild life they lead, ranging the forests and the hills, without laws and without knowledge, like the beasts that perish. But Chiron was far unlike the rest ; from his youth he had loved wisdom and peace ; and to him the gods had given immortality for his reward.

This gentle Centaur was well known to Heracles, who, to his sore grief, had wounded him by misadventure in a fray with his savage kinsfolk. Nor could the wound be healed, for the arrows of Heracles were dipped in the deadly venom of Hydra, that hundred-headed snake he slew erewhile ; so Chiron had ever since languished in his cavern dwelling.

"I am weary of my life," said he, when Heracles had told him the judgment of Themis, "and even were I not, how could I lay it down better than in redeeming noble Prometheus ? Now let Death take me when he will, for cheerfully do I yield up my immortality into the hands that gave it."

Thus Chiron paid the debt of justice for Prometheus ; but the life he gave was not then claimed of the Fates, nor until long after ; for grateful Earth sent forth a potent herb whereby

his wound was healed ; and she gave him knowledge of all simples and the virtues of every plant and flower, so that he became the wisest of physicians.

And then were Zeus and Prometheus reconciled at last, the King of gods having loosed the Titan's fetters with his own hand ; then was there such joy in heaven as had not been from the foundation of the world. In that hour of peace and goodwill Prometheus told, unasked, the secret on which hung the fate of Zeus : " There is one among the goddesses," he said, " whose lot in marriage shall be to bear a son mightier than his father. It is of wedlock with her that Zeus must beware, for a son mightier than such a sire would have power illimitable, and make himself lord of the world by lifting of a finger ; yet because her beauty casts a glamour over all that look on it, Zeus will seek to take her for his bride. The heaven-dwelling gods have not yet beheld this world's desire, and her name must not be told them until the day of her appearing ; therefore I will utter it in secret to Themis, daughter of Earth, who shall reveal it at the destined hour. For I myself go hence, having seen the travail of my soul, even the redemption of man out of his helpless misery ; farewell,

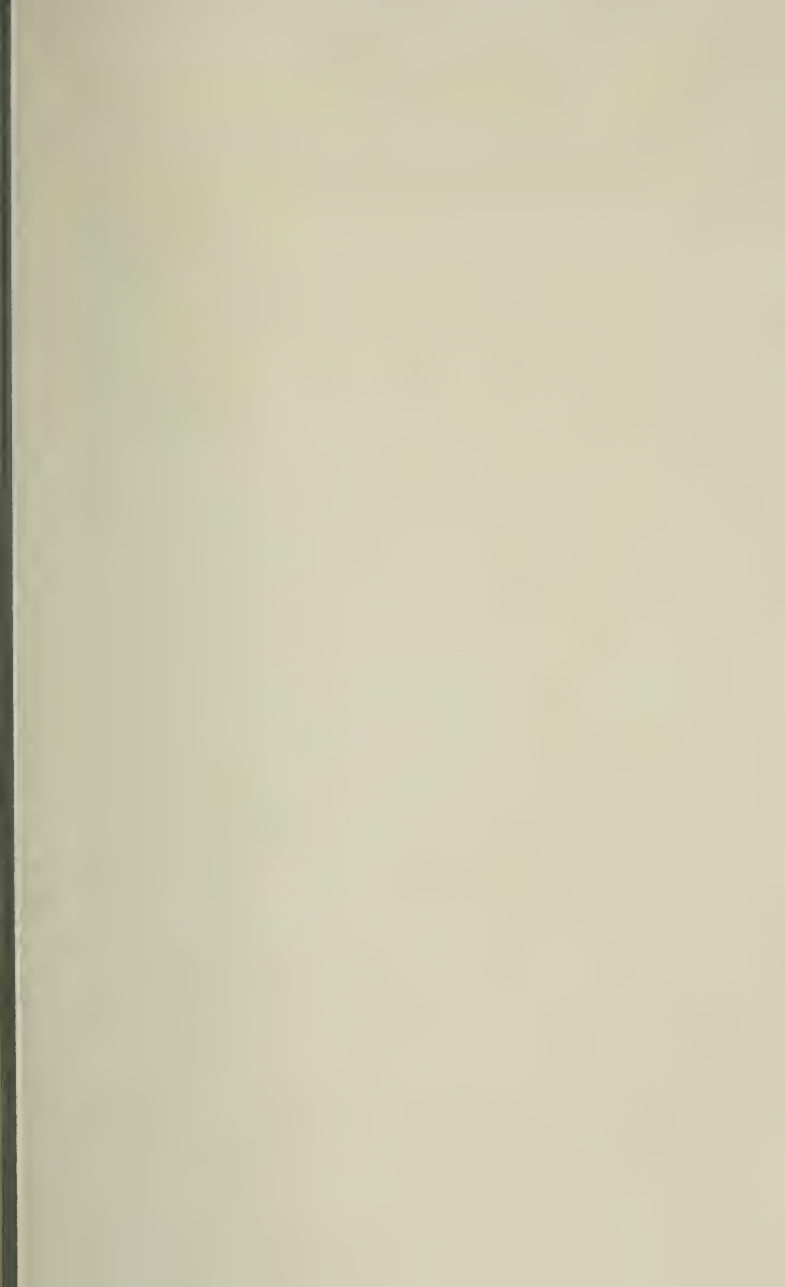
Olympians all, and may such peace be upon you as waits Prometheus after his long pain, in the far islands of Elysium."

"This very night, my Orpheus," said Calliope after a pause, "this very night the ransomed Titan has entered into the peace of those happy isles, for joy whereof not we only, but all the Immortals, keep high festival. Nay, there is joy in all the world, because evil is overcome of good and the long reign of hate is over. And now, dear one, you have heard the last of our nine wonder-stories, and for a long, long while you will not see us again; but to-night there must be no sadness of farewell. Lean your little head on my shoulder—yes, let me hold you close this once, as though you were my own tired child, and we will sing you asleep."

So Orpheus rested in her tender arms, and while drowsiness weighed down his eyelids he heard once again the song of the Nine as it were the song of nightingales, and through the lullaby the low voice of Calliope spoke still, in words like these: "Thus is begun the making of a minstrel, but he, our fosterling, must learn other lessons than ours, and make a music we know not, in the days to come. Yet always the

echoes of our singing shall linger in his ears, and all he has heard beside our forest well shall live in his remembrance, by the virtue of this charm."

Then, as it seemed to the child, two tears fell dewy soft on his closed eyes, and with that his slumber deepened into trance and he knew no more. But whether those were tears indeed, or sprinkled water of the Well of Memory, is unknown to the teller of this tale.





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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

From the painting by G. F. WATTS

PART II

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

CHAPTER XI

FAREWELL TO THE FOREST

NINE years were come and gone since the child Orpheus spent his last night in the enchanted glade. Once more summer had robed the oak forest in her green and gold, and once more the woodmen were returning from the yearly festival they kept with their neighbours of the village. Up the steep woodland paths they came, a merry company, and in the midst of them walked a tall, fair lad, holding a lute. His yellow hair was crowned with laurel ; by the admiring court his companions paid to him, it seemed that garland was a badge of victory, and he himself one whose good success was matter for pride to them all. But none eyed the lad so proudly and so fondly

as a grey-headed man, bent with years and toil, who leaned upon his arm.

“How happy is Oiagros,” cried a woodman, looking on these two, “who has seen his son bear off the prize to-day from the best minstrels in the land.”

Even so it was ; there had been that year a new thing at the Midsummer feast—a contest of song ; and it was Orpheus, whose first, long-forgotten lay had so illpleased the woodmen, to whom prize and victor’s wreath had fallen amid their joyous acclaims. The prize was the fair lute of seven strings which he now carried, and this was how it came to be won.

A stranger, handsome and young, visited the village in the spring-time, and gave himself out for a merchant, grown rich in trafficking with Apollo’s pilgrims at Delphi. He spoke much of the famous trials of minstrelsy that were held there, and said, would the folk of the village hold such a trial at their festival they should not want for a prize worthy the winning. So saying, he showed them a lute of silver and ivory, cunningly fashioned, a treasure for a king ; at the sight whereof they gladly promised to hold that trial, and straightway sent news of it through all the countryside. But they owned that one thing troubled them : there was not a man among them

all who had skill of minstrelsy enough to be judge in such a contest.

"Care not for that," said the stranger ; "I shall be here, and by those who know me I am reckoned no mean judge of that art."

Thus when the day came all the singers and harpers of the regions round about were gathered together, and each in turn gave proof of his skill.

Now Orpheus stood in the throng with the rest of the woodmen, and some of them urged him to try his fortune ; for of late they had become much enamoured of his singing, such marvellous tales could he chant to a rude harp he had framed for himself. He hung back and said : "I have not brought harp or lute, like these others."

But the stranger overheard him, and cried—

"Take the lute that is set for prize, young minstrel, for we will hear you also."

So Orpheus took it, and it was as a familiar thing in his hands ; and the song he sang was of Apollo, how he came an infant to Delphi. When he ceased the stranger smiled on him and said—

"Keep my lute, for you have won it ; and wear this laurel crown for a token that you are victor in my contest."

Then all the folk shouted a great applause, and

the friends of Orpheus pressed round him to clasp him by the hand ; he turned to thank the stranger, but he had already mingled with the crowd ; and it seemed that he soon quitted the village, for Orpheus sought him in vain.

That evening, when the feast was done that Oiagros made for his neighbours, and father and son sat alone together in their hut, Orpheus took up the lute and began to look at it more narrowly by the light of their clay lamp.

There were names wrought in small, clear characters of gold upon its ivory scroll-work—nine well-remembered names that he read with a beating heart. Others, then, it seemed, must know his Ladies of the Well ; now he might surely learn more of them without betraying their trust !

“Father,” he said, “what names are these wrought upon my lute ?”

Oiagros looked long on the golden script, and his sunburnt face grew pale. “Have you ever heard,” he said slowly, “the name of your mother ?”

“No, father,” answered the lad, wondering ; “you have never spoken it in my hearing.”

“It is written here,” said Oiagros ; “and by that token I know the time is come for me to speak it at last.”

Thoughts of bewildering sweetness rushed over Orpheus like a flood. "O," cried he, "I know it—it is Calliope!"

Then, as his father looked at him with mute surprise, "Ask me not how I know," he faltered; "I feel that if one of the Nine be indeed my mother, it must be she. But how is it possible? My mother—has she not long been dead? Was I not her true child—nor yours—ah! what does all this mean?"

"My son," said Oiagros, "for true son of mine you are, listen to me, and you shall hear a story that I have waited long to tell. There was a woodman of this forest who in his youth was even such as yourself—a dreamer of dreams and a haunter of solitary places, but one who lacked your gift to utter the fair thoughts that came to him there. Now he lived in his hut alone, until one stormy night a stranger maiden knocked at his door, asking for shelter. He took her in and gave her of his supper, and they sat all night long beside the fire; for the maiden recounted the most entrancing stories, and she had a voice that would have wiled the bird off the tree. Presently she began to talk of himself and his doings as though she had known him his life long—nay, she told him things none knew

but he, so that he saw she was a Fay. Then the woodman was afraid, but for all that, when morning came he could not bear to lose her company, and he asked her to stay with him and be his wife. And the Fay said, 'If you are content to have me to wife for a year and a day, it shall be so; but after that I must go back to my sisters in the forest, and you will see me no more.'

"Well content was the woodman, for he thought, 'A year is a long while for a man to live happy,' and so they were wedded. But the months of that year passed like days, and its days like hours, and short enough it seemed to the woodman ere it had fled away. Not till it was ended did the Fay tell him her name; then he knew her for one of the nine immortal sisters who are called the Muses. He had heard from wandering bards the praises of those Ladies of Song, who witch the high gods with melody when they chant to Apollo's harping at the celestial feast; shepherds, too, had told him strange tales of a secret glade in the forest that the Muses haunted of moonlight nights; thither, they said, a lamb of the flocks sometimes strayed and was never seen again, but great was ever the luck of him who thus lost a weanling from his fold. Ay, and not seldom

the shepherds had heard the singing of the Muses sound faint and sweet in the far woods at midnight, but none had ever seen them ; the only mortal who ever looked upon their loveliness face to face was this poor woodman.

“Now when he knew his bride was one of that immortal sisterhood he saw how vain was any hope that she could be won to abide with him ; she, whose eternal summer could not fade, how should she endure a mate whose youth must wither like the grass and his years pass away like a shadow ? As well might he plead with a star that had strayed earthward but for a moment, to forget the heavens and shine under his lowly roof.

“The hour came when they parted ; with what farewells his heart remembers—but I leave unsaid. I think the woodman could not have tarried in the world that had darkened around him, save for one thing ; he was not left quite alone. She who was lost to him had given a little babe into his keeping ; and at first he cherished it for her sake, but the tiny golden-headed thing grew dearer and dearer to the lonely man ; and for many a year now all his hope and comfort has been in that beloved son. Have I made the story plain to you, my child ?”

“Father,” said Orpheus, his eyes filling with

tears, "I know now why you have been always sad, and why you could never speak to me of my mother. Only I do not understand how this lute could be a token to you that I was to hear these things to-night?"

"I should have told you," said Oiagros, "that when the Muse departed she charged the woodman to keep silence until their child should bring him her name written in gold upon an ivory scroll, and then to tell him all. And she said that in the same hour he should learn how she had watched over the boy with a mother's love."

Then Orpheus knew that he too might speak at last; and he told his father all that had befallen him in the enchanted glade, from the day when he first sang to the woodmen and fled away heart-broken at their bitter mockery. But Oiagros could recall nothing of that, because the spell of the Water of Forgetfulness was still upon him.

"I remember," he said, "how you began to sing to us, when we were come home from the Midsummer feast, where we heard a right good minstrel. That was your ninth birthday; I had taken you to the festival for the first time. But I forget what happened after you sang, dear lad; for as I listened it seemed I heard the very tones

of your mother's voice and that you looked at me with her eyes."

Much more had Oiagros and his son to say to each other that night, and they talked long and late. When Orpheus slept at last in his bed of leaves, his father was still sitting beside the embers of the hearth, revolving many memories. But at early morn the lad was awakened by a loud, joyous cry ; he started up, and saw that he was alone in the hut. The cry came again through the open door—"Calliope ! Calliope !" Then silence ; a sudden chill of dread crept to his heart, and he stole forth, vaguely aware that some unknown presence waited for him in the grey dawn. It was the gentle presence of Death. Oiagros lay white and still on the dewy grass before his threshold ; his eyes closed, a smile of utter peace on his worn face. In that sight the son who so loved him could feel there was nothing for tears.

And thus it was with no bitterness of grief that Orpheus stood not many nights thereafter by the grave in a mossy dell where the woodmen had laid their comrade ; rather could he have found it in his heart to rejoice while he thought on that happy passing of a weary soul. But for very loneliness he could not stay in his empty home,

and he was minded to try his fortunes further than the forest. To-morrow he would set forth into the world, a wandering minstrel ; and now he came to say a last farewell and make the wonted offering at his father's tomb. With reverent hand he laid a curling lock of his fair hair on the flower-strewn mound, and murmured the words of pious custom, "I greet thee, my father, I greet thee ! Light lie the earth on this place of thy rest, and well may it be with thee in thy long home. Greeting and farewell ! Greeting and farewell !" Was it the mountain echo that repeated the last words ? No leaf was stirring in the moonlit woods, yet there came a sighing through the tall poplars that edged the vale ; and then near voices chanted the refrain, "Greeting and farewell ! Greeting to thee, O sleeper, and fare thee well !"

Orpheus turned, and saw the Nine Sisters coming towards him with hands full of lilies and asphodel, and eyes bent upon the ground. Three times they slowly circled the grave from left to right, scattering their flowers the while, and singing plaintively and low ; the words he heard not, save when they bade sweet peace be to the mortal whose earthly toil was done. This ended, they glided silently away, and each, as she passed

Orpheus, gave him a gracious look of remembrance; but Calliope lingered behind the rest, as once so long ago, and, taking him by the hand, led him gently from the dell. "Come," she said, "my child; the night wears on apace, and you have need of rest before the morrow's journey. I will bring you on your way homeward, and as we go you shall tell me somewhat of your hopes and purpose in setting forth to other lands."

Now it had seemed to Orpheus that if ever he saw this wondrous mother of his again, he must feel such awe and strangeness in her presence as would keep him tongued-tied; but at the sound of her tender voice and the touch of her hand his misgivings vanished; it was to him as though they had been parted but a day, and he were still the child whom she had lulled to sleep in her loving arms. So while they went along he unburdened all his heart to the great Muse as freely as when she had soothed his first childish grief. He told her why he was eager to be gone, and how he longed to see the fair Southern lands of which he had heard; and how, now that there was none to miss him in the forest, he would wander from city to city with his lute, like the minstrel he had envied of old, singing those marvels of the ancient ages which he had learned

from the Nine. For by their lessoning, he said, he had already won favour and fame among his own people ; and being so taught, he hoped ere long to sing the Perfect Song, as Urania had foretold.

As the youth spoke of this hope, his cheek flushed and his blue eyes grew wistful ; he said in a lower tone, " It is of that I dream, and for that I live."

" My Orpheus," said Calliope, " if my sisters and I could teach you to sing that song, you should not have left us when you did, nor would I now bid you depart once more. But not all the lore of all the Muses can avail you in this ; said I not long ago that you must turn some day to other teachers ? "

" Who are they, mother ? " said Orpheus ; " and how may I find them in the lands whither I go ? "

" Fear not to miss them," answered the Muse, " for it is they who will find you. As for who they are, you will know full soon ; nay, the first of those great masters of song awaits you even now. Go hence, then, with good hope, my well beloved, and the Fates send you your heart's desire. Here I bid you farewell ; for see, yonder is the hut, and that threshold I cross not again."

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With that she embraced her son tenderly, and was gone. And in the morning Orpheus took his lute, and went his way into the world beyond the forest.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE HOUSE OF APOLLO

IN those far-off golden days, man's life was full of music from the cradle to the grave. The shepherd piped to his flock ; the smith sang at the forge and the housewife at the loom ; the husbandmen had their songs of seed-time and harvest ; merry minstrelsy brought home the bride, and not without dirges due the mourners buried their dead. And everywhere the wandering singer would find all doors open to him for the love men had to his art ; none more welcome than he to a share of the best, whether the feast were spread in king's palace or peasant's cot.

Thus it was with Orpheus as he fared southward day by day ; and wherever he came the hearts of the folk were won by his beauty and by the sweetness of his singing ; so that they would fain have kept him among them. But neither with rich nor poor would he sojourn for more than a night,

being bound, he said, upon a certain quest ; and he would take no gift at parting, but gave gentle thanks to his hosts, and so bade them farewell. Now when he had journeyed many days, Orpheus came upon a broad highway, stretching far to southward, and saw throngs of travellers passing along it, some afoot and some mounted on horse or mule. To one of these bands he joined himself, and having learned that they were going to Apollo's festival at Delphi, he asked to be of their company, which the pilgrims granted with right good will.

They had not gone far upon that road when they overtook a train of sumpter-asses and of wagons drawn by slow-footed oxen ; and at the head of them an old, white-bearded king was borne in a litter amidst a great retinue of slaves and spearmen. And beside the litter a dark-haired maiden, richly arrayed, rode a sleek, ambling mule. As the young minstrel passed the maiden turned her head, and her shy, soft gaze rested on his face ; at the same instant the lute slung from his shoulder gave forth a jarring chime, and one of its strings snapped in twain. "That bodes misfortune," said his companions, and they made the sign that wards off evil, and hurried onwards. But Orpheus neither heard nor heeded the omen ;

he followed them in rapt silence, for the face the maiden had turned towards him but a moment was as a vision out of the land of dreams. He scarcely knew that it was beautiful, with the beauty of a pale flower, and lit by eyes of liquid sapphire ; he felt as one might who had glanced upon an open book, and seen that some fateful message to himself was written there in lines that vanished ere he could decipher them. Nor did he even wish to know who this maiden was, or hope to see her again ; she belonged to a wonderful moment that could no more come back than a dream can. So he listened indifferently to the talk of his companions about the old king in the litter ; how he came from a far Northern land that some of them knew well, and was journeying with this great train to Delphi to seek healing of Apollo for a disease that no physicians had been able to cure. "Saw you the maiden wrapped in a green mantle, who rode at his right hand ?" said one ; "she is his only child, the princess Eurydice. 'Tis said her father will shortly bestow her in marriage, and royal suitors flock to the palace ; well they may, for she will inherit his fair kingdom."

Towards evening of that same day these pilgrims came in sight of snow-crowned Parnassus,

and saw the sheer wall of rock at the mountain's foot glow like a golden rampart in the sun. Crescent-shaped was the mighty barrier, and divided midway in two shining cliffs, between which a torrent descended in silvery falls to the long glen below. And at the glen's head, close under the cliffs, flashed the gilded roofs of temple and treasury and colonnade ; it seemed a city stood there, all gold and marble, so many and sumptuous were the mansions in this glorious dwelling-place of Apollo. "Delphi ! Delphi !" cried the pilgrims. "See yonder the Shining Cliffs and the Water of Castaly !" and they hastened forwards to mingle with the crowds already nearing the sanctuary. In those great precincts there was house-room for an army, and all who came were entertained as guests of the god, and lodged as suited their degree ; stewards of the temple hospitably received Orpheus and his companions, and when they had washed off the dust and soil of travel, the tired wayfarers were served with meat and drink of the best in a painted chamber.

Now while they supped, a man of grave and reverend aspect, somewhat stricken in years, came in to them and greeted them courteously.

"I," said he, "am Xenarces, whose family is one of the five Delphian houses to which belongs

the care of Apollo's temple with its treasures and broad lands. It is my office at this time to oversee the entertainment of his guests, and look well to it that they lack nothing."

The pilgrims thanked him for his courtesy, and when he had heard that they fared to their hearts' content he sat down beside Orpheus, and joined the company in pouring out the accustomed libations to the gods. The chamber where they sat was open on one side to a pillared court; in this court a flock of tame pigeons were feeding, and it chanced that one of these birds, fluttering into the chamber, began to sip the wine-drops sprinkled on the floor by Orpheus as he made libation. Xenarces smiled, and said to him, "Do you know, young stranger, how great a crime was once averted here by the very thing that you see this pigeon doing?"

"No, noble Xenarces," answered Orpheus, "but very gladly would we hear the tale, if it please you to tell it."

"I will make a bargain with you," said the Delphian. "By the lute at your side I perceive you are a minstrel, and if, when I have related the event I have in mind, this company agrees that they have never heard a story more marvellous, you shall repay me with a song."

To this Orpheus and the rest assented eagerly, and Xenarces began his tale.

THE STORY OF ION.

My grandsire—may he rest in peace—being a scion of one of the noblest Delphian houses, and having, moreover, both father and mother alive, was in his thirteenth year chosen by lot among others of the same age and condition for the coveted office of Laurel-Bearer at Apollo's festival. Yearly, as you know, we of Delphi keep the feast of the god, but once in every nine years it is celebrated with especial solemnity, as it will be to-morrow ; and at these Greater Festivals he whom we call the Laurel-Bearer carries in procession an olive-bough decked with garlands of the sacred bay. Now my grandsire, being thus chosen, remained, according to custom, in the temple precincts until the day of the feast ; and on the eve thereof he witnessed the strange happenings which I shall now relate. Many a time have I heard him tell the tale in my boyhood, for the good old man was never weary of repeating it.

There was then among the ministers of the god a youth, Ion by name, who won the praise of all for his diligent service in the holy place. His country and parentage were unknown ; his

only home was the temple ; and it was said that he had been found there as a babe by Apollo's priestess herself. This kinless waif could not aspire to the priesthood, which belongs solely to those of the ancient Delphian stock ; but he deemed it happiness and honour enough to be a doorkeeper in the house of the god.

It was sunrise of the day before the festival when Ion, as his habit was, set about sweeping the temple-porch with his broom of bay and sprinkling pure water on the marble floor. Presently there approached him a troop of damsels in bright array ; they paused upon the steps of the shrine, and spoke eagerly together ; and it was plain from their talk that they viewed the lordly temple for the first time. "I had not thought," cried one, "that the gods were so richly housed elsewhere than in Athens."

"See," cried another, "how wondrous fair are yonder sculptures above the portal ! Gods and giants, wrought to the life, are waging the great war that poets tell of—and look ! our own Athena strikes down one of the Earth-born with her spear invincible !" Then one of the damsels advanced to Ion, and asked whether it were permitted to enter the temple itself.

"It is not permitted," said he, "to any strangers,

save to those who have offered sacrifice to the god and seek to inquire of his holy oracle."

"We must tarry here, then," said the damsel, "and await our mistress, whom we left making such offerings at the great altar yonder as befit her high estate."

"I perceive, maidens," said Ion, "that you come from famous Athens; tell me, I pray you, what lady of that city you call mistress."

"One who is sovran lady there," answered the damsel; "even Creusa, daughter to King Erechtheus of glorious memory. Lo, hither she comes!"

With that there drew near a woman beautiful and queenly, clad in sumptuous raiment and wearing a jewelled diadem. Her face was very sad, and as she halted, gazing on the temple, Ion saw that her eyes filled with tears. "Ah, royal Creusa," said he, "how comes it that you weep at sight of this hallowed dwelling, which all pilgrims else behold with thankfulness and joy? Believe me, though a stranger to you, I cannot but be deeply moved at the distress of one so fair and gracious."

"I thank you, courteous youth," answered Creusa; "the sight of Apollo's house waked a bitter memory within me—but the pang is past. Let us speak of other things; my name, it seems, is known to you; be pleased to tell me your own,

which should be a noble one, for gentle manners come of gentle blood. Happy the mother," she added, looking at him with a sigh, "who has a son such as you."

"Lady," said Ion, blushing under her gaze, "I am but a nameless foundling, whom the Pythia, Apollo's prophetess, reared from the day that unknown hands laid me an infant at this portal, and she is all the mother I have ever known."

"Alas, poor lad," cried Creusa, "it is my turn now to pity ; and who would not pity your hard lot—an orphan—and destitute—and a thrall instead of free."

"Nay," said the youth, "Apollo's thrall I am, but I count such servitude a nobler thing than liberty itself ; fatherless I am, yet the god is to me a father, and we his ministers lack neither food nor raiment beseeming the household of a king. Call me rather happy beyond the common fate of mortals."

"Do you never think," asked Creusa very low, "that the mother who bore you may yet grieve for her lost child—as one known to me has never ceased to grieve ?" She paused, and said to her handmaids, "Go, see if my lord and husband be not at hand by now" ; and as they withdrew, she turned again to Ion, who was looking at her with

surprise. "Yes!" she said, "I have a friend who has suffered even as it may be your mother did; it is for her sake I have hastened hither before Xouthus, my husband, that I may inquire a certain thing of the god on her behalf. For to none but myself has she told her secret sorrow—but now, kind youth, I am about to trust you with the tale, since it bears some likeness to your own, and methinks you will not refuse to help me in my errand here, when you have heard all."

"Very gladly will I do aught to serve you, gracious Lady," said Ion; "if I interpret your words aright, the friend of whom you speak has lost a child, and desires Apollo to reveal what has become of it. But in what manner was it taken from her—stolen by some enemy, or seized by pirates to be sold into slavery? And how, or why, could she make a secret of its loss?"

"Listen, and you shall hear," said Creusa. "This hapless friend became in her girlhood the bride of Apollo——"

"What say you?" exclaimed Ion, starting. "Apollo wed a mortal maiden—nay, this passes belief!"

"It is true, nevertheless," replied Creusa steadily, "nor can you be ignorant that many heroes and kings boast their descent from such

unions of immortal gods with the fair daughters of men. But ill-starred among women are they whose beauty makes them desired of heavenly bridegrooms—ay, with long sorrow must they buy that brief glory! Now Apollo took a pledge of this maiden to keep their wedlock secret until he himself should declare it, and after a while he departed from her, promising to return if she remained faithful to him; so when it came to pass that a son was born to her, she hid the babe in a cavern on the Hill of Athens, having wrapped it in rich webs of her own weaving, and laid it in a carven cradle. So soon as might be, she visited the cave by stealth, and alas! cradle and babe were gone. Long, long she searched the hillside round about for any trace or token of its fate, but all in vain; from that day to this no tidings have ever reached her; one thing only has given her hope that the child did not perish—if some prowling beast had made prey of it, the cradle would not likewise have vanished.”

“Surely,” said Ion, “Apollo would protect his own; did she not once think that *he* had carried the babe away, to be reared in safety? And did he not return to her as he promised?”

“She never saw him more,” said Creusa, casting down her eyes. “Call her faithless if you

will—but in a little space her father made a marriage for her with a certain noble warrior, and what could a weak maiden do but submit? Faithless! Is it not Apollo that is faithless—Apollo who came not to her succour in the hour of need?”

“Oh, hush, dear Lady!” cried the pious youth distressfully, “these are no words to use of him who does all things well; though for a season he may veil his purpose, be sure that he ever brings good out of evil. Be patient, and think no more of questioning him concerning the lost child, for the gods love not those who pry into their secret dealings.”

At this moment, the prince Xouthos was seen advancing with cheerful mien—a tall and stalwart chieftain of ripe age, clad in a gorgeous suit of armour. In a hurried whisper, Creusa told Ion that her husband was come to Delphi to inquire of the oracle why their marriage was so long unblest with offspring; he had turned aside upon the road to the shrine of the hero Trophonios, having heard that oracles were given there also; and nothing must now be said of the errand on which she had hastened to Apollo's sanctuary before him. Courteously Xouthos greeted his wife, and bade her be of

good cheer, for the oracle of Trophonios had declared that they should leave Delphi *no longer childless*; more than this they must wait to hear from Delphi's lord. It seemed he had already offered the due sacrifice, and having recommended Creusa to repose herself awhile in the guest-chamber allotted them, he entered the temple, elate with hope. But Creusa turned away in mournful silence; Ion looked after her, and sighed for pity; it was, he felt sure, her own story that she had told him; her own child that, if indeed it lived, had grown up a motherless waif—like himself.

Now there was in Creusa's retinue a certain aged slave, who had had the charge of King Erechtheus when a child, and had watched with loving care over her own infancy; his lifelong devotion had endeared him to his royal mistress, and she treated him almost as a second father. This old man went at her request to bring Xouthos to her chamber so soon as he came from the temple with the response of the prophetess; but she meanwhile sat rapt in bitter musings. What was it to her that Apollo might promise an heir to the throne of Erechtheus—could that atone for the long years of anguish, or soothe her longing for her first-born? And of him she must know

nothing till the end; she saw clearly that neither Ion nor any of the Delphians would put the question to Apollo which she dared not ask for herself. Nothing remained for her but to endure in silence; her only comfort must be that children, if they came, would bring joy to her brave and kindly husband, and to her loyal people of Athens.

As she thus mused, the old slave returned, alone; he came in with hasty step and indignant look, and cried in a trembling voice, "Ah, daughter of Erechtheus, we are undone—betrayed by your false husband and the god he has bribed!"

"What words are these?" exclaimed the astonished Queen, "What has befallen? My husband false! The old man surely dotes."

"No, no!" he said more calmly. "Listen, child of my heart; there is a plot against you; trust the old servant to smell out treason! Now hear what I have seen and heard, and judge for yourself. No sooner came Xouthos forth from the door of the temple than a youth who stood within the porch advanced to meet him; whereat Xouthos, suddenly flinging his arms about his neck, loudly hailed him by the name of son. The youth shook him off angrily, deeming him some

madman—or feigning so to deem, who knows? But Xouthos, clinging to his arm, declared that Apollo had given this response : ‘ *Him that shall meet thee as thou crossest my threshold, claim for thy son; him do I give thee to be thy son by adoption, for he is in very truth thy nearest kinsman.*’ Now when the youth heard this he said, ‘ Apollo’s will be done. At his sacred bidding I will yield you henceforth the name of father, and the due obedience of a son.’ Forthwith Xouthos embraced him again with tears of joy, and led him away, vowing to sacrifice a hundred oxen to Apollo, and as many to Bacchus, Lord of Parnassus’ Hill, and to give a kingly banquet to all the Delphians in honour of this auspicious day. The traitor ! The crafty villain ! Thus thinks he to foist his own child by some alien woman upon us, thus to set a usurper on the ancient throne of Erechtheus—but that shall never be.”

“ I know not what you mean,” said Creusa faintly.

“ Why, beloved mistress,” said the old man, “ it is all clear as noonday. Bethink you who and what Xouthos is : a foreigner, a wandering soldier of fortune, whom King Erechtheus rewarded with your hand for the great service he did Athens in war. Who knows aught of his

life before he came among us? Who knows that he had not already a wife of low degree, dead or forsaken ere he wedded you? I say this day's work proves it; I say this boy, whom Xouthos will present to you as his adopted son, is his own son; the oracle and the pretended accident of their meeting were contrived to deceive you. '*His nearest kinsman*' quoth the oracle! Ay, and had you seen the joy of Xouthos but now, you would have guessed how near! O, 'twas a deep-laid scheme; the lad has been reared here until the time was ripe; then your husband makes this journey on the plea of consulting the god, having bought the response he desired beforehand—yes, bribed Apollo and his priests with *your* wealth, my wronged Lady. What cares he that you are childless, while he can play the happy father? Now will he exult, now will he scorn and slight you, whom he has duped so easily; nay, if children are yet born to you, he will thrust them from their rightful heritage for the sake of this alien youth. Will you endure this, daughter of so many kings? No, by the soul of Erechtheus, you shall be avenged this self-same day, though I die for it."

"What will you do?" said Creusa fearfully yet eagerly.

“Kill Ion!” answered the old man in a fierce whisper.

“Ion!” cried the Queen, turning pale, “Was it, then, Ion who met my husband?”

“That is the lad’s name,” replied the other. “It means *the Comer*, as I heard his father say, who had the craft to ask him for it, like any stranger, and to swear ’twas of lucky omen, seeing Apollo bade him take the *first-comer* for son. But this Comer comes not to Athens—alive.”

And now Creusa’s last doubt vanished; the conviction rushed upon her that Ion was in truth her husband’s son; the priestess, who pretended to have found him, had been charged with the care of him by Xouthos, and had helped in the shameless fraud of his adoption. This gentle Queen had yet the high spirit of her ancient race; it rose in passionate revolt against the indignity put upon her, against the treachery and deceit that Xouthos had practised to gain his ends. “Doubtless,” she thought bitterly, “he feared I should prove a harsh stepdame; how little he has known me in all these years! If he had trusted me with the child, it should have been to me as my own—it should have stilled my mother-hunger for the lost one.” With that she remembered the strange tenderness that came over her while she looked

upon Ion, and how she had envied his unknown mother ; pity strove with anger in her heart, and she said to the slave, " This lad . . . he is so young . . . too young to die. Is there no other way ? "

But he answered sternly that there was none, and bade her beware of delay. " What we do," he said, " must be done quickly, if you are to escape suspicion of prompting the murder. Nay, start not at the word ; what is a boy's life to the honour of a great and ancient house ? My Princess, this is no time to falter ; think, could Erechtheus speak from his grave, would he not bid us deal swift death to this upstart alien, who, if he lives, will sit on the throne of glorious Athens ? Now hear my resolve. I will poison Ion secretly at the banquet that is toward, if you will give me the wherewithal ; but if you will not, I will stab him in the sight of all, and then let come what come may. For when I meet my master in the Underworld, he shall not say I proved unfaithful to him at the last. "

" I will do anything," cried Creusa, " rather than suffer you to face certain death ; but how can *I* give you what you ask ? If you mean I should purchase it, to whom in this strange place shall I offer gold for some deadly drug ? That were to betray all. "

The old man smiled grimly, and stretching forth his hand, drew from Creusa's wrist a golden bracelet in the form of a serpent. "Here is what I need," said he. "Have you forgotten, Lady, what the hollowed head of this snake contains? A drop of the venom of those serpents that formed the Gorgon's tresses! This bracelet Athena herself gave to Erechtheus, when she had slain that fell monster—but why do I repeat a tale you have known from childhood? I go, for by this time the feast should be begun, and when the goblets are filled, then let the son of Xouthos beware of his cup-bearer!"

So saying, the ancient slave hurried away. Creusa turned to her maidens and said, "My girls, you have heard all, and now both my life and the life of my faithful servant depend upon your silence. Be loyal and true, as you have ever been." They all cried out with tears that they would keep her secret to the death, and she thanked them, smiling wanly, and after that there was silence in the chamber.

An hour had passed, that seemed long as ten to the women in their suspense, when a serving-man of the Queen's rushed in, haggard with alarm. "Fly, royal mistress!" he cried wildly; "fly to the altar ere the Delphians seize upon you! They

have taken the old man in the act—your bracelet was found upon him. Oh, flee to sanctuary while yet you may!”

But Creusa stood like one turned to stone. “The boy!” she gasped. “Ion . . . is he dead?”

“No,” said the servitor; “he tasted not the cup. Apollo has preserved his own. But ask no more—we must away. Ah, maidens, look, she swoons, our Lady! Quick, quick! let us carry her to the altar of refuge!”

With trembling haste they bore the fainting queen to the altar that stood before the temple, and as they set her down she revived and said, “Tell me, tell me what has befallen.”

And briefly the trusty slave told her all. The old man, he said, had mingled with the attendants at the feast and busied himself so earnestly in serving the guests that his officious zeal raised many a smile among them. But especially was he forward to wait upon the son of Xouthos with every mark of reverence. And when, at the banquet’s close, all the cups were filled for the pouring out of libation to the gods, it was the old man who handed a brimming goblet to Ion. Now Ion was lord of the feast—for Xouthos was not yet returned from sacrificing to Bacchus on Parnassus—and it behoved him to utter the accustomed

prayer to Zeus and pour the first libation. Even as he did so one of the guests uttered a chance word of unlucky omen, and with that Ion set down his cup untasted and bade the rest do likewise. "Bring fresh goblets," he said to the slaves, "for I have heard an unlucky word, and we must make libation anew." So this was done, and for a while all was merry, while the wine went round. But presently some of the temple doves fluttered in to peck at the crumbs beneath the tables, and one of them was seen to dip its beak into the drops of wine that Ion had poured on the ground at the first libation. No sooner had the bird drunk of that draught than shudders convulsed its glossy body; it struggled piteously for a moment, and fell dead on its back, with pink claws stiffly upturned. "The dove is poisoned," exclaimed Ion,—"poisoned with wine from my cup! Where is the man that gave it me?" They dragged the old slave before him, but not a word would he say until, searching his garments, they found the golden snake, and Ion cried, "This bracelet I saw upon Queen Creusa's arm. 'Tis she who has plotted my death; see, friends, the snake's head is open and the hollow is tinged with some dark liquid." Then said the old man, "Spare my Lady, for the guilt is mine alone." At

that the Delphians were for slaying him upon the spot, but Ion bade them do him no hurt. "The poor old slave," said he, "is but a tool in the hand of his mistress. Keep him safe here, worthy friends, until I learn what she can say of this matter."

"Down with her!" cried the angry guests. "Down with the murderess! She shall die the death!"

It was at this moment that the terrified serving-man had fled unobserved to warn Creusa. And now, as he repeated those dreadful words, she looked up and saw Ion coming towards her, followed by a band of armed men. "Cling fast to the altar," whispered the slave, "and they will not dare lay hands on you."

Ion waved back his followers and strode up to the Queen where she knelt, clutching the altar-stone. She gave one look at his beautiful young face, pale now and sternly set, and bowed her head, unable to bear his accusing gaze. "Unhappy woman," said he, "I do not need to ask if you have sought my life; your eyes have told me that. I ask what wrong I have done you that you should wish to murder me?"

Creusa lifted her head, and with sudden passion, "What wrong?" she said. "Can bitterer

wrong be done to a queen and the daughter of kings than that some nameless woman's son should usurp the place of her lawful heir, should lord it in the house of her fathers, and watch with greedy eyes for her to die that he may wear her crown? This wrong you would have done me, and I were no true child of Erechtheus had I not striven to hinder it."

"O blest Apollo, my preserver," cried the youth, "hear for what a cause this woman would have destroyed thy innocent servant within the very courts of thy sanctuary! Drag her from the altar, temple guards; against the god has she sinned, and not against man only. This holy place shall not protect a wretch who would have polluted it with murder."

Then proudly rose up Creusa before them all, still holding by the altar, and she said, "Though life be hateful, I will not die a death of shame. Touch me not, servants of Apollo, for I am his; yea, I bid him bear me witness—I call on him, if there be any faith or truth among immortal gods, to save me now, whom once he held so dear."

"Be silent, thrice-miserable!" exclaimed Ion in tones of horror. "What! dare you take his holy name in vain at his very altar? With my own hands I will tear you from it."

But as he sprang forward to seize her, a voice from the temple porch cried, "Hold, Ion! Lay no hand on Apollo's suppliant, I charge you!" It was the priestess who had thus spoken. Slowly she descended the steps, a venerable woman in trailing robes of purest white with a crown of laurel on her grey hair. She beckoned the youth to her side and put something enwrapped in a purple cloth into his hands. "Child," she said solemnly, "I have an errand to you from the god. He sends you this, the cradle wherein I found you lying, a helpless babe, and bids you look within it for tokens that shall reveal the secret of your birth. Delay not, for this is the destined hour when I, whom you have called mother so long, must yield that name to her that bore you." So saying, the priestess kissed his forehead, and with a murmured blessing she turned and went again into the temple.

Wonderstruck, Ion undid the purple cloth, and disclosed to view a cradle of cedarwood, gay with painted figures of beasts and birds. And as all present gazed curiously thereon, eager to learn the secret of which the Pythia had spoken, Creusa rushed suddenly from the altar and flung herself sobbing upon Ion's neck. "My son!" she panted out, "my own, own child! It is the

very cradle I laid my baby in, the cradle that once had been mine ! ”

“ *Your* child ? ” cried Ion, with angry amazement. “ What madness is this ? Ah ! ’tis another trick to save your wretched life ; but it shall not serve,” and he strove to thrust her from him.

“ No, no ! ” she said, clinging to him frantically, “ it is no trick, but blessed truth. Prove me ; bid me say what lies in the cradle under that veil—*my* veil ! ”

“ Stand at a distance, then,” said Ion, “ and turn your back upon me while I look upon the tokens.” Creusa obeyed, and having lifted the brodered veil, he asked her what he saw.

“ You see three things,” she answered. “ One is a piece of woven stuff.”

“ You have guessed well,” interrupted Ion ; “ but such a guess was easy.”

“ Nay, hear me,” went on the Queen ; “ it is wrought with the figure of the winged Gorgon ; the weaving is faulty and uneven, for it was my first girlish task at the loom.”

“ Tell me of the other tokens,” said Ion, in a voice that trembled.

“ There is a spray of olive,” said Creusa, “ fresh and green as when I plucked it, for it grew on Athena’s sacred never-fading tree. And there is

also the necklet that each babe of our house has worn as a talisman, since the goddess bestowed it on Erechtheus her fosterling—a golden necklet in the form of a snake.”

A cry of wonder broke from Ion. He turned, holding up the three tokens for all to see; and running to Creusa, he clasped her to his breast, saying, “Mother, dearest mother, you are found at last!”

My grandsire used to tell us that none who saw those two sobbing for joy in each other’s arms could refrain from tears, and I may well believe him. With one accord, he said, the bystanders stole silently away, as feeling it was not for strangers to witness emotion so sacred, nor hear the first outpourings of the mother’s long pent-up love. But afterwards it was rumoured in Delphi that while Ion and Creusa were yet speaking together there befell the crowning wonder of that wondrous day. For the goddess Athena, guardian of their race and city, appeared to them in all her glory, and they were sore afraid. But she bade them be of good cheer, and made known to them all the providence of Apollo, and that he it was who had brought Creusa’s babe to Delphi. “Unto this day,” said the goddess, “he has watched over you both for good, nor shall his

loving-kindness fail you your lives long. Twice so many years as she has mourned shall Creusa live happy in her son's love, that for all her pain she may have joy in double measure. And for thee, Ion, Apollo ordains a glorious lot in the years to come ; founder shalt thou be of mighty cities in a fair and goodly land that he will give thee for thine inheritance, and that country shall make thy memory famous to all generations, being called Ionia after thy name."

Such was Athena's prophecy, and my grand-sire lived to see it fulfilled. In his riper years he sojourned more than once in renowned Athens, where our house has many a noble guest-friend, and the saying went there that never mother and son loved each other so entirely as Queen Creusa and her long-lost child.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BRIDAL OF WEEPING TORCHES

THE Delphian noble, having ended his story, inquired of the listeners whether it were not in truth the strangest they had ever heard, and when they all agreed that nothing could be more marvellous, he called upon Orpheus to redeem his promise.

So the youth took his lute, and sang that hymn in praise of Apollo which he had heard the Muses chant on the night Thalia recounted the story of Leto's babe. Xenarces listened entranced ; and when he took his leave he said, " Surely the god's own lute rings not more silver-clear while he leads the chorus of the Nine, nor can their heavenly voices be more honey-sweet than yours, young minstrel ; may Apollo himself reward you for this fair tribute of praise."

On the morrow began the festival, and Orpheus beheld with wonder and delight the solemn pomp

of the sacrifice, the garlanded processions and chanting choirs, the white-robed throngs of worshippers, and all the splendours of the many-pillared fane.

Now at noon was held the contest of minstrels in singing the praises of the god, and his priests sat enthroned as judges on the broad steps of the temple. Orpheus remembered the stranger from Delphi, and the desire took him to try whether his lute might bring him good fortune yet again, though his heart misgave him at the view of the multitude gathered round. Nevertheless, he stood forth last of the many who contended, and began to play a prelude ere he sang. But as the first chords rang out a keen-eyed priest leaned forward and cried sternly, "Stay, stranger youth! Tell me your name and country, and whence you had that lute in your hand." And when the lad had answered, rather with surprise than fear, the priest rose up and said in a terrible voice, "You have spoken falsely. There is but one such lute in the world, and it is one of the hallowed treasures of this temple. On the very day you say a stranger gave it you in the distant North, I myself beheld it safe in the secret vault wherein Apollo's wealth is hoarded. Ho, temple-guards! Keep the young minstrel prisoner while I go to search the treasury—but well I know I shall search in vain.

Vain was the search in truth, and the priest came quickly forth again, rending his clothes and crying, "Sacrilege! Sacrilege! It is Apollo's lute he holds—he has robbed Apollo! Let him die the death!"

Then wrathful faces closed about Orpheus, and swift hands tore the lute from his grasp; and the roar of many voices surged round him like an angry sea, "Sacrilege! Away with the accursed! Have him forth of the sanctuary and stone him with stones!"

But suddenly a woman darted from the temple; like lightning she went past the priests and down the steps into the raging throng, straight to the lad's side. The crowd fell back, awestruck, as from the coming of a spirit, and a reverent murmur rose among them, "It is the Pythia!"

"In the name of Apollo!" cried the woman, and unbinding a white fillet from her hair she threw it round the neck of Orpheus, then went back into the temple as swiftly as she had come, followed by the muttering priests. Silence fell on the multitude; all eyes were bent wonderingly on Orpheus, where he stood dazed by the suddenness of these happenings.

"You are safe, stranger," said one of the temple-guards, touching him gently on the arm. "What

it may mean I guess not, but Apollo's holy prophetess has herself marked you inviolate. Know you not that the white fillet is the badge of the god's suppliants—they who come for sanctuary to his altar, whom to outrage is sacrilege unspeakable? Were your hands reddened with a father's blood, that sacred emblem would protect you; nay, not a man in Delphi but would draw sword on any that dared molest you here."

"That is a true word," said an old man among the bystanders, who seemed to speak with some authority, "but here is no question of bloodshedding. Our lord Apollo has vouchsafed to pardon the offence of this young minstrel against him, heinous though it was; the lute is recovered; and for my part, friends, I know not why we stand here at gaze, wasting the hours we might spend in merry-making."

At these words the crowd began to scatter towards the outward courts, where pedlars and sellers of fruit and of wine drove their trade, and Orpheus was left alone before the temple. He sat him down upon the marble steps and rested his head upon his hand. "I will not leave this place," he said half aloud, "until the god proves my innocence. For he knows I have spoken truth, though none would believe me, no, not one."

And bitter tears filled his eyes at the thought of that disgrace. "Do not weep," said a soft voice, "there is one here who believed you, if none else did, and prayed that Apollo would defend the guiltless."

Orpheus looked up, and saw the princess Eurydice standing before him, attended by her handmaids. Her eyes met his; not fraught now with mystery and glamour, but with a heavenly pity; her pale loveliness seemed at once more human and not less ethereal than his fleeting vision of yesterday.

"Be comforted," she said again. "I have seen you saved as by miracle from a hideous death—O, my heart stood still at those dreadful cries!—and surely he who sent his priestess to deliver you will make your truth clear as the noonday."

The youth had risen, murmuring he knew not what broken words of thanks; he stood abashed by her queenly grace, touched to the soul by the simplicity of her kindness. Eurydice seated herself on the step above him, and said, with the same frank gentleness, "My father is even now inquiring of the oracle how he may be healed of his long sickness, and I wait to hear what answer Apollo has given him by the mouth of the Pythia; if you will bear me company meanwhile, I should

take a pleasure to hear your story, that I may tell it presently to my father ; for he loves minstrelsy no less than I do, and I know he will be desirous to aid you. He has brought rich offerings to the temple, and it may be the priests will sift this matter more diligently at his request."

Then Orpheus placed himself at her feet, and shyly at first, but gathering boldness as he went on, he spoke of his early longing to be a minstrel ; of how he won the lute, and of the great hope that had come to him that he might sing a song not yet heard on earth—the Perfect Song. But something withheld him from telling her aught of the Muses, or that he was the child of Calliope ; he said only that he was the son of a woodman, and had learned such skill as he possessed from certain teachers in the forest. The princess listened with earnest looks, and whenever he paused would draw him on to tell her more by some question that seemed to chime with his unspoken thought ; so that the talk between them was like the talk of near friends for freedom and sweetness.

But presently the old King appeared in the temple porch leaning on the arm of a slave, and Eurydice flew to meet him. "What tidings, my father ?" she cried eagerly ; "what remedy has the Pythia bidden you seek for your healing ?"

“A strange one, my child,” said the King, slowly descending the steps; “out of the inner shrine, from her golden seat of prophecy, she gave it as Apollo’s answer that I should be whole and sound again if I betrothed my daughter to the first suppliant I should meet within his sanctuary.”

As he said this, his eye lighted on Orpheus, and he cried, “Behold, this is the man! I see the fillet of white wool about his neck.”

Now the King had not been present at the contest of minstrels, and knew nought of what had since befallen, having been carried into the temple by another way; therefore he said to Orpheus, “What countryman are you, stranger youth, and what is your degree? Let me hear, I pray you, your name and parentage, and for what cause you are come a suppliant to the god.”

“King,” said the lad, in a voice trembling with astonishment, “I am Orpheus, son of Oiagros the woodcutter, of the country of Pieria in the North.” And no more could he say, for very bewilderment. Then Eurydice gently took the word, and told her father all she had seen and heard but now.

“Daughter,” said the King, “if all this be so, it is plain Apollo’s favour rests on this young minstrel; yet is he no mate for you, being lowly

born, and branded moreover with the reproach of sacrilege in the face of all Delphi and of the concourse gathered from so many lands to this festival. Fear not ; rather will I languish under my disease until death release me from suffering than make you the unwilling bride of such an one."

But Eurydice answered, blushing deeply, "Say not *unwilling bride*, my father ; that I cannot be to him whom Apollo has appointed. Nay, had the oracle declared I must lay down my life to do you good, you know your child would gladly have bought health and strength for you at that price."

"He is a churl's son," said her father angrily, "the blood of a line of kings cannot mingle with his."

"Dear father," said the princess, "have I not heard you say that the spirit within a man makes him what he is—that a king's son may be a churl at heart, and a slave harbour free and noble thoughts? As for the charge laid against this youth, I dare pledge my maiden honour that it is false ; for look but on his face ; he is no thief or temple-breaker, and that will Apollo make known in his own good time."

Modestly she spoke, but with a kindling eye and steadfast look ; the old King, strangely moved, was about to answer her, when the temple doors

were flung wide and the priests came forth in procession, amid the blare of silver trumpets. They halted in the great porch, and a herald cried three times, "Let Orpheus, son of Oiagros, hear the summons of the god!" Then said the chief of the priests, "Sound, trumpets, and call hither all the folk, that they may likewise hear the truth that Apollo has revealed to us even now."

So the trumpets sounded a gathering-call, and the folk came thronging to the temple front. And in the face of all the multitude the priest beckoned Orpheus to draw nigh, and solemnly restored the ivory lute into his hands. Then said he to the people, "Behold, we make restitution to the minstrel of that which is lawfully his, albeit this is none other than the sacred lute of Apollo. Now hear a miracle; it pleased the god to appear of late in a mountain village of far Pieria, wearing the likeness of a traveller, and to be judge at a contest of minstrels. This youth did he crown victor; and gave him for prize this precious thing from his own treasure-house, gracing Orpheus, son of Oiagros, with such honours as never mortal minstrel won before. Therefore it was that our lord sent forth the Pythia to protect his chosen; and when we inquired of him concerning atonement for the deed of sacrilege, he bore

witness for the minstrel by her mouth, and bade us restore the lute and proclaim him guiltless. Now praise ye all Apollo, Lord of unerring truth; and bring each man his freewill offering to the great altar of burnt sacrifice, giving thanks to him who preserved us from shedding the innocent blood."

Then the priests and their acolytes moved forwards with chanting and swinging of censers, and all the people shouted and flocked after the procession to the great altar in the midst of the court. But the old King motioned his daughter and Orpheus to remain beside him ; he looked long at their young faces, both transfigured with grateful joy ; at last he said, "I little thought to betroth my child to a wandering minstrel; but who may contend against the high gods? Surely these signs and wonders are witness that this youth was born to no common destiny. Take the maiden's hand, Orpheus of Pieria, for to you I give her ; and Apollo's will be done."

So saying, the King joined their hands in token of troth-pledge ; and in the very act, "What is this?" he cried ; "I feel that I am healed—the burning fever leaves me!" In the same instant his bent and wasted limbs grew shapely and sound ; the hue of health overspread his ashen

face and light came to his eye ; he threw down his staff and drew himself to his full height, then turned and entered the temple with the quick, firm step of a man still in his prime.

“ Let us follow him,” said Eurydice softly ; “ he goes to render thanks to Apollo,” and she led Orpheus within the holy place.

Thus was the King’s daughter out of the North betrothed to the woodman’s son. On the morrow they set forth with the old King for his own city in Thrace ; and if they had been well pleased with each other at their first meeting, every day of their long journey brought them deeper content, until they had no wish in the world but to be always together, as long as they both should live. And now Orpheus perceived that the teacher whose speedy coming Calliope had foretold walked with them unseen, and that the name of him was Love.

Now since the road to Thrace passed through the mountain country of Pieria, the travellers encamped one night on the outskirts of the oak forest where Orpheus was born, and he longed greatly to see Calliope, and tell her of his new-found joy. When all slept, he took his lute and stole into the moonlit woods, for he thought that she must have foreseen his coming, and perhaps

would meet him there ; presently he lost the paths he knew of old, and, wandering perplexed, came suddenly upon the enchanted glade.

The Nine Sisters, seated beside their Well, looked up smiling as he drew near, and Thalia cried, "Lo, our minstrel returns to us with joy, bearing the voiceful treasure of Apollo. Now shall he tell us of that yet rarer gift which the Lord of all minstrelsy bestowed on him in holy Delphi. Speak, Orpheus ; have you not a sweeter story for us than we ever told you in the days that were ?"

"Ah, Ladies of Song," said the youth, "well I know you read my inmost heart, but what is written there I lack words to utter—mortal speech is all too harsh and poor."

"Then sing to us, Orpheus !" cried the Sisters ; and Calliope said, "Take your lute, my child, and let music say for you what no words can. Sing as that Master has taught you, the mysteries of whose art the gods themselves desire to look into."

So Orpheus touched the lute, and sang of his human love to those bright Immortals. Tears dimmed the eyes of Calliope as she listened ; across the serene faces of her sisters flitted a shadow of vague regret ; almost it seemed they

envied for an instant an uncomprehended bliss, revealed to them in that earthly song.

Only Urania sat unmoved and aloof, her clear, steadfast gaze fixed upon the heavens ; she alone repaid the minstrel with neither smile nor sigh when the lay was done. And this not a little chilled his ardent mood ; for in singing of his Eurydice he had felt within him a passion and a power unknown before ; his thought soared high on strong wings of melody ; now, surely, by grace of Love the Master he had attained at last !

Urania drew softly near him, where he stood with downcast looks. "Dear singer," she said, "be patient as I, who have waited so long, and still must wait. For all the beauty and the wonder of it, there yet lacks something to this song of yours. A mighty minstrel is Love, but there is another, of whom you are to learn one lesson more. Know, Orpheus, that Love, the heavenborn, has an earthly twin, and wheresoever Love is, his brother will come ere long ; unbidden he will sit at your marriage-feast ; his still voice will whisper to you in the crowning hour of your joy ; this is the teacher, the framer of subtlest harmonies, who will lead you by ways that you know not to Music's utmost goal."

"Love's twin brother," murmured Orpheus

dreamily ; "I have no guess what his name should be."

"Seek not to know it now," answered the star-crowned Muse ; "soon enough will it be familiar to you as a friend's. And now we part, for dawn is rosy in the East ; see, yonder sparkles the Morning Star—be that your pilot, and as you leave this glade look not behind you, else never more must you return.

With that all the Nine rose up as if to depart also, waving their hands in farewell ; Calliope all this while had sat with face averted ; she cast one sad and loving glance upon her son, kissed his forehead and turned silently away. He durst not linger, but fixed his eyes on the pilot Star and walked straight onward, heavy at heart ; so strange a cloud seemed to have fallen over the radiant sisterhood. Never before, he remembered, had he visited the happy glade without hearing their sweet bird-notes as he came or went ; never before had they been thus silent, looking on him with eyes that seemed for once to reflect the shadow of mortal care.

But of all this he said no word to Eurydice, and in the light of her presence the vague fear that oppressed him was soon forgotten. Long as was their road, these lovers could have wished it

longer, so sweetly passed the days, so blithe and free their wayfaring life under the open sky, in the green heart of the woodlands. "This is the life for me," the king's daughter would say ; "till now I have lived between sleeping and waking, shut in by palace walls. Would I had been born a beggar-maid, and you had loved me in my rags, that we might wander the fair world over, you and I together."

The journey ended at last in the strong-walled city of the King beside the swift river of Hebrus. Forthwith he made a great feast for all his folk in honour of his home-coming, and proclaimed to them the miracle of his healing, and the will of the god at Delphi concerning Orpheus and Eurydice.

"To-morrow eve," said he, "my daughter shall be wedded, and you shall all fare yet more sumptuously at the marriage-supper."

So on the morrow the whole city kept festival ; and toward evening the men-folk, high and low, flocked to the palace gate where the young boys and maidens were already assembled in two several choirs, the maidens bearing baskets of flowers and the boys unlighted torches, ready to escort bridegroom and bride. For the King had given his daughter a fair house in a meadow without the

city wall, to dwell in during the summer heats, and this she chose for her new home. When the wedlock rites were done, and all the guests had eaten and drunk their fill to the joyous sound of harps and flutes, Eurydice came forth, led by her father, and the fresh voices of the choirs raised the marriage hymn in sweet alternate strains. At that signal a chariot was brought near, drawn by two milk-white steeds ; Orpheus mounted it, and took the reins ; the old King placed Eurydice beside him, bidding them set onward with good luck. Now as they went the chanting maidens scattered their flowers before the chariot, and the youths walked on either hand—but in dismal silence ; for their torches, newly kindled at a coal from the marriage-altar, burned blue and flickering through clouds of livid smoke. And all who saw it shook with fear ; knowing the signs of weal or woe given by the torches that light home a bride, and that she only is happy for whom they burn clear and steady. But a direr portent followed ; as the boys waved the torches to and fro, striving to fan their dying flame, the last dull sparks went out with a hissing sound, and showers of amber drops fell from the blackened pine-brands. A cry of horror burst from all the bridal train, “The torches weep ! O

blessed gods be good to us in this dread hour ! ” Orpheus turned deathly pale, and his hand trembled upon the reins. “ Courage, my husband,” murmured Eurydice, and throwing back her gold-broidered veil she looked him in the eyes. Her face was wan as his own, but she smiled, and calmly said, “ Let us go forward, beloved ; while you are with me I fear no evil.”

So they came darkling with all their retinue to the house prepared for them. The mead round about the homestead was wet with dews of night, and Orpheus would have borne his bride in his arms to the portal ; but she said gaily, “ Nay, I am Lady here, and must lead you by the hand to this house of mine—yet for the custom’s sake you shall lift me across the threshold, if you will.” With that she led him through the shadows towards the lighted porch, whispering that now at last they were come home. But as they reached the threshold, her foot slipped upon something in the deep grass ; an angry hiss rose from the ground ; and with a faint, shuddering moan the bride sank lifeless in her bridegroom’s arms. They saw on her little foot the print of a serpent’s fangs, and knew that hope was vain. Then, when he had bidden the rest depart, Orpheus crossed that threshold with his frail burden, and laid it on

the marriage couch, and kneeled beside it, pressing the white, cold cheek to his own. And ever and again his cry went up in the dark house, "Eurydice! Eurydice! Come back one little moment! How could you leave me with never a word, never a look, on this night, of all nights?"

CHAPTER XIV

ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD

THUS it was that Love's twin-brother, Grief, came to Orpheus on his marriage-night, no more to leave him until the end.

Now when all the land had mourned for Eurydice many days, the King, her father, sent for him and said, "Husband of my daughter evil-starred, the gods have willed that I should go childless to my grave ; but seeing you are now kin to me by marriage, you shall raise up an heir to my kingdom. Put away, therefore, unavailing sorrow, and choose you a wife among the noble maidens of the land, that I may see children born to you before I go the way of all flesh."

But Orpheus answered that he would live and die the husband of Eurydice, and of none other ; and when he saw that his answer displeased the old King he departed out of the land of Thrace

and came again to his own country. For the ways of men were become hateful to him, and he thought to dwell solitary in the forest and pass the remnant of his days in mourning his lost love.

So Orpheus built him a lodge of green boughs in the heart of the woods, far from all resort of the forest folk ; and while he brooded forlorn, Grief, the unseen comrade, taught him a minstrelsy strange and new. And by day he kept close, but by night he wandered abroad with his lute, singing of death, and of love that cannot die.

Now as he thus roamed one night, filling the silent woods with melody, he came unawares to the glade of the Muses, and, rapt in his song, saw not that they were near him as of old. Nor they only, for the lovely Wood Nymphs peeped from the trees around ; and the goat-foot Fauns, their playfellows, with every beast and bird that wakes by night, lurked in the tangled undergrowth, all listening spellbound to the voice and lute of Orpheus. He ceased, and like one aroused from a dream, saw the Nine sitting with down-dropt brows beside their enchanted well, and all save one were weeping. But the face of Urania was transfigured by a smile ineffable as she rose up and took him by the hand.

"Minstrel," she said, "you have learned the last lesson. This is the song I have waited for, and the hour of your power is come. Look around you, Orpheus; behold these tears upon immortal eyelids; see yonder the woodland creatures—into them, the soulless, your music has breathed a soul; nay, things without sense or life blindly obey its call."

She pointed to where an opening in the glade gave prospect of the neighbouring hill, and wondrous was the sight that Orpheus saw; the hill's rocky crest hung forward, like the head of one who listens, and down its sides moved a green phalanx of nodding larches.

"O!" he cried, stung by a great sudden thought, "if there be in Music such compelling art, and the hour of my power is come, can I not win back Eurydice from the realm of souls? By the grace you have ever shown me, heavenly Muses, tell me how I may reach the Underworld where she abides, for I will sing to Pluto on his throne, entreating him to give me back my bride. And if I cannot move the dark king to set her free, then let him keep me captive too, that I may dwell with her among the dead."

"We cannot guide you to that world, my

child," said Calliope ; " not one of the Immortals may breathe its gloomy air, save Hermes only, who shepherds souls on their way thither. And none among living mortals can cross its threshold but those few on whom the high gods have looked with peculiar favour, such are the terrors that they must encounter. But since you are bent upon that perilous journey, betake yourself to far Eleusis ; there entreat guidance from the Mother, for she herself has mourned a lost one, and she has compassion on all who sorrow."

Silently, then, the Nine beckoned Orpheus to the well side, and as he gazed on the water the face of Eurydice rose like a pale star from its shadowy depths, and its ripples changed into the ripples of her dusky hair. With a passionate cry he bent to kiss those lips ; but as the cold wave touched his own the vision dissolved. A chill like death benumbed his sense, and when he came to himself he was lying alone in the sunlit forest beside a bubbling spring.

Once more Orpheus fared southward with his lute ; but lute and minstrel were silent now ; the song he meditated as he went was not for mortal ears or the cheerful light of day. At last he came at sundown to a fair plain, bordering the

Southern sea. A highway ran through the midst of it, but it seemed uninhabited, and the tired wayfarer, who had fasted since daybreak, saw that he must pass the night there unsheltered and unfed. Now, as he lay by the roadside, with a stone for his pillow, the sound of many voices chanting and a host of twinkling lights drew near in the gathering dusk. Orpheus looked and listened with a beating heart. It was the chanting he had heard in that dream of long ago, when the Muses sang to him of Demeter and her Koré; and he knew that these were the pilgrims coming to Eleusis along the Sacred Way. Nearer they came, the torchlight shining on their rapt faces, and even as in his dream, he followed the marching throng.

At length the pillars of a great gateway loomed before them. The chanting ceased and the torches were extinguished as the long procession wound its way into the sanctuary of the goddesses. In silence and utter darkness the pilgrims were led by unseen guides onward and onward; for hours, it seemed, they paced along the echoing pavement of courts or corridors; then all at once they stood in a vast hall, ablaze with light from a thousand cressets. When his eyes undazzled Orpheus saw that rows of stone steps encircled the hall, whereon

the pilgrims took their places, marshalled by white-robed priests, and as they seated themselves a great voice cried aloud, "Pure ye are come to the pure. Blessed are the eyes that see and the ears that hear the things which are done in this place and hour." But of those things I must needs keep silence, for the lips of the pilgrims were sealed by vows of secrecy ; and this much only is known from the witness of the men of old, that whoso beheld them was changed in heart and mind thenceforward, and walked in innocence all his days, until he passed not without hope through the grave and gate of death.

Now, while Orpheus looked upon these mysteries, he prayed fervently to the divine Mother who had known love and sorrow, and it was revealed to him that he should find a descent to the Underworld on the headland of Taenarum. And on the morrow he began his journey to that place, where being come at last he saw a cavern in the midst of a gloomy wood. Darksome was the cavern, but he entered it boldly, and groped his way along its windings, ever downward and downward, until a wan and sickly light dawned upon him from a huge rocky doorway. Across its threshold lay a grisly hound, in size like unto a bull ; and at the sound of footsteps he reared

three heads, and from three triply-fanged mouths sent forth a blood-curdling growl. Soon as the monster saw Orpheus, the bristles rose upon his coal-black hide, and, with wide-opened jaws, he gathered himself for a spring. But the minstrel struck his lute, and at its sweet, appeasing harmony the Hound of Pluto laid him down again, and his fiery eyes closed in slumber. Lightly then Orpheus stepped past the guardian of the threshold and wended on his way.

Next he came to a grey and sluggish stream, and behold, the hither bank was thronged with shadowy forms, who made moan in thin, shrill voices, and stretched their arms yearningly towards the further shore. From thence came a skiff rowed by a hoary-bearded man, and he cried, "Let the dead who have received due rites of funeral embark. None else do I, Charon the Ferryman, suffer to cross this River of Lamentation." Then such of the spirits as showed him a certain token he ferried over in his boat, which, though crank and crazy, sank no lower under that freight; but the rest he thrust away, despite their piteous entreaties. Twice the Ferryman returned, and the second time Orpheus embarked among the eager ghosts. "Who is this," cried Charon suddenly, "that weighs down my skiff's

prow?" And staring fiercely upon Orpheus, "Thou art flesh and blood," he said, "What dost thou here among those who have passed the tomb?" With that he caught up a pole to thrust him overboard; but straightway the minstrel chanted a stave of melody so enthralling that Charon bent him to the oar again, nodding his ancient head and keeping time with measured strokes till the skiff touched shore. And lightly stepped Orpheus to land, and hied onwards through a gloomy valley. After this, he saw a troop of maidens drawing water from a spring in earthen pitchers, but so fast as they filled them the pitchers were empty again, for they were pierced with as many holes as a sieve. "Alas! maidens," said he, "who has doomed you to this fruitless labour?"

"It is the punishment of our sin," they answered. "We are the Danaids, princesses of Argos, who slew our bridegrooms rather than endure the toilsome lot of wives. Now, therefore, we toil for ever to no purpose. Yet there is one yonder who would gladly change his task for ours."

Then Orpheus was ware of a man, well-knit and tall, who by sheer strength pushed a huge round boulder before him up a steep hillside.

Staggering and panting he gained the summit—and lo! the great stone slipped from his grasp and rolled thundering to the plain; and the man had no sooner descended than he began that labour anew. But a thought came to Orpheus; he struck his lute as the boulder again touched the hilltop, and forthwith it stood still.

“Play on, play on, thou wondrous minstrel,” said the man, “and give me respite if but for some brief moments.”

“Willingly,” said Orpheus, “if you will tell me who you are and what brought you to this pass.”

“I am called Sisyphus,” answered the other; “king was I in famous Corinth, and had a name for subtleness of wit beyond all mortals, so that Zeus himself disdained not to take counsel with me as with a friend. But that friendship was my bane, for he told me a certain secret thing under pledge of my silence, and by a rich bribe I was tempted to reveal it to him of all others whom I had sworn should never learn of it. Therefore has Zeus laid on me this heavy burden for ever, because I could not bear the light burden of a secret.”

Orpheus could not linger, but he ceased not from his playing as he went onwards, and for so

long as the sound of his lute reached the hill Sisypheus rested from his toil. A little further in the vale Orpheus saw before him a great wheel fixed to a pillar, and the wheel spun round and round faster than chariot-wheels can spin when the charioteer drives furiously in a race of steeds. But as he drew near the wheel stood still, and he saw that one wearing a kingly crown lay thereon, his outstretched limbs bound to the four spokes.

"Play on, thou wondrous minstrel," cried the crowned figure, "and give me respite how brief soever from the dizzy whirl that torments my brain."

"That will I," said Orpheus, "if you will tell me your name and how you fell into this evil plight."

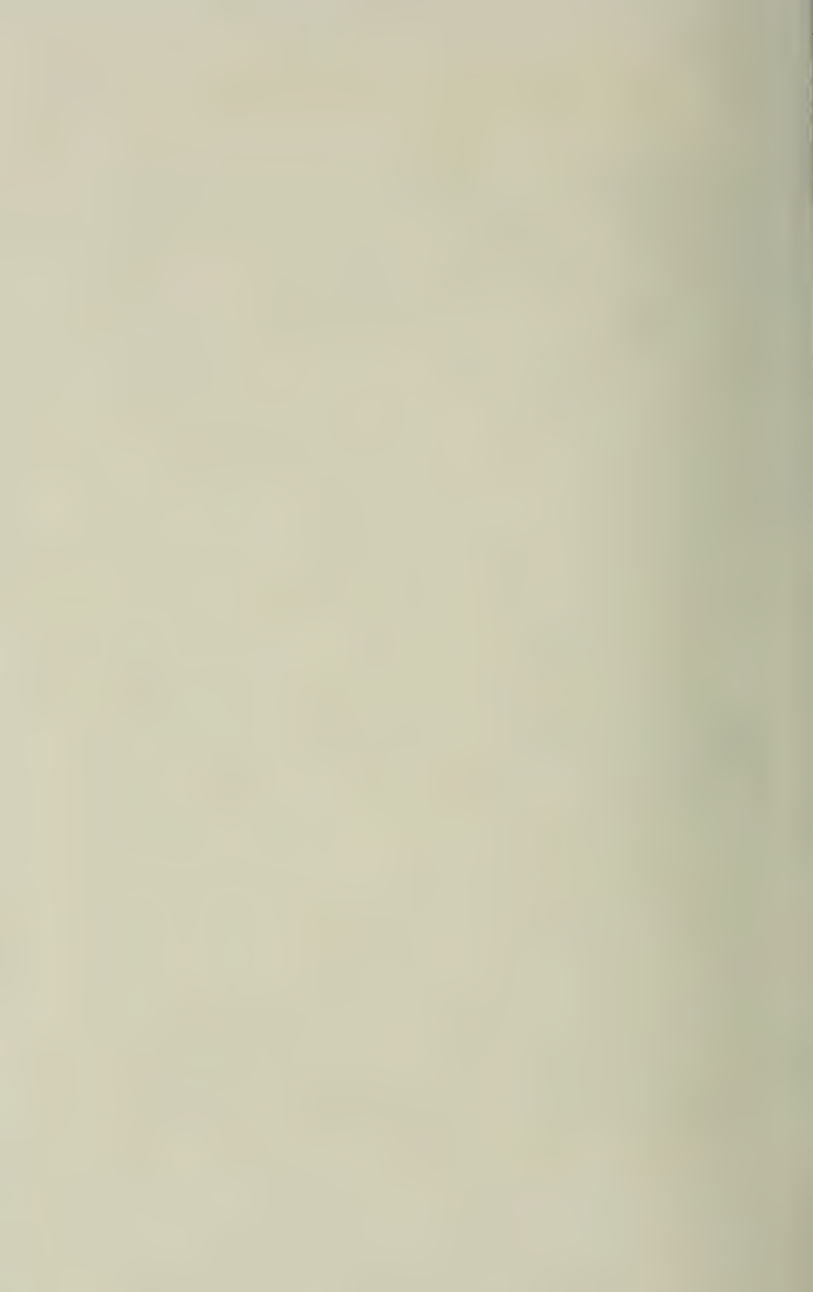
"I am Ixion, a prince of high renown," said he upon the wheel, "and for a double crime I suffer this torture without end. First of mortals was I to shed the blood of a near kinsman, but from that guilt Zeus vouchsafed to cleanse me, when I fled a suppliant to his altar. Yea, and he showed me marvellous favour, granting me to sit with him at the heavenly feast. But in the prideful folly of my heart, I deemed myself his equal, and sought to win the love of his glorious Queen, profaning the sacred tie that binds host



Anderson photo

SISYPHUS

From the painting by TITIAN



and guest. Then Zeus sent a phantom in her likeness to me by night, that he might prove me to the uttermost; and as I embraced the seeming goddess she dissolved into a cloud, and I was hurled headlong to this place of doom. Thou hast seen, perchance, the spell maidens practise to draw home a recreant lover—how they twirl and twirl a wheel with a speckled wryneck tied thereon? Behold, I am made into the counterfeit of that love-charm, forasmuch as I madly hoped to cast love-glamour over the Bride of Zeus.”

Now, when Orpheus had left that chief of sinners, he came forth of the valley upon wide and level meads, flowering with asphodel, where the spirits of ancient heroes roamed singly or in troops. Then met him a youth of noble mien in the garb of a hunter and said, “Newcomer to these shades, tell me of thy courtesy, knowest thou the land of Calydon? Thence came I not long since, and fain would hear some tidings of my home.”

Thus far had he spoken when his eye fell on the shadow that Orpheus cast—for in that light like a waning moon’s it showed black upon the meadow grass—and he cried, “Thou art no shadowless spirit, but a living man! Who

art thou, minstrel, and how camest thou hither ? ”

And when he heard the tale of Eurydice, the youth wept for pity.

“Gentle Shade,” said Orpheus, “grieved at heart am I that I can tell you nothing of Calydon your home-land, for the very name of it is unknown to me. But I pray you, let me know the name and fortunes of one so worthy to be remembered.”

Then said the youth with tears, “Good were it, Orpheus, for the race of mortals that they had never been born, nor looked upon the sunlight ; for who amongst us may turn aside the doom that comes of the gods ? I am Meleager, son of Oeneus, king in Calydon, whom a pitiless woman reft of life when it was at the sweetest.

“In the hour of my birth the Sister Fates drew near to Althaea, my mother, and gave her a half-consumed brand from the hearth, saying that my life should last until the hour when the rest of that brand was burned ; wherefore she kept it safe, hidden in a coffer. Now the king, my father, offered sacrifices of thanksgiving to all the gods for the birth of his son, save to Artemis, Lady of the Wild Things, and her he forgot through heedlessness. And the vengeful goddess,

biding her time until I came to manhood, then sent a huge wild boar to ravage the land, which laid waste all our fields, and slew the younglings of the flocks, ay, and whatsoever men he encountered, in his deadly rage. When this was noised abroad, princes and chiefs from far and near gathered to my father's house for the hunting of that monster, and a mighty chase began among the hills. The fell beast turned not once nor twice upon the hunters, and his tusks dealt death to ten of the boldest ere my javelin pierced his brain. Then—woe is me!—fierce disputing arose among us for the spoils of his carcase; for two of my mother's brethren were the first to wound the boar, and claimed a share in the prize, which I would gladly have yielded, but my father withstood them, saying none but the slayer should take of the spoil. Soon all our company waxed hot upon this side or that, and from high words the two parties came quickly to weapon-play; blindly we fought, like men smitten with evil madness, and in the mellay the two princes, brethren of my mother, fell—by this luckless hand. What did Althaea in her passionate mood when we brought home those evil tidings? Alas! she snatched the brand from its hiding-place and cast it on the glowing hearth, and cried, 'One life

I will have for those two so dear to me.' And with the burning of the brand I felt the blood ebb from my heart like an ebbing tide, and the sweet life fail from within me ; as the last red embers died, my spirit fled, wailing for youth's flower untimely blasted."

When he had thus spoken the Shade of Meleager made a sorrowful gesture of farewell and would have turned away, but Orpheus prayed him to tell where stood the dwelling of Hades' King.

"Straight onward lies your way," answered the other ; "beyond these Mourning Meadows thou wilt come to a vale of cypress, and in the midst of the vale stands the House of Pluto. Mayest thou find grace, true lover, with her who is the Light of that dim abode."

So Orpheus went his way over the fields of asphodel, and as he went he beheld the mighty shades of captains and of kings stalking majestically as in life ; he saw the long-vanished beauty of the queens of old, and all those flowers of maidenhood that Death had gathered to adorn his peaceful garden. Many a lover, many a bride sat musing on lost delight under boughs of weeping willow ; many a little child played in the cool meadow grass. But Orpheus tarried not to hold

parley with young or old ; for now he saw the dark cypress grove at hand, and knew that he was come to his journey's end.

Now as he entered the grove, he saw two carven chairs of black marble, one on the right hand and the other on the left ; that on the right was empty, but in the other a tall young man was sitting, clad in rich armour, like a king's son. He sat with chin resting on his hand, and eyes fixed upon the ground, and when Orpheus greeted him he neither spoke nor moved. So still he was that the minstrel would have deemed him a graven image, but he saw that he breathed and cast a shadow on the greensward.

"This hapless prince," he thought, "is held here, alive among the dead, by some enchantment ; I will sit down awhile in yonder chair and try whether my lute cannot break the spell."

But as he approached the other chair one stepped forth from among the cypresses, crying, "Beware that perilous seat, Orpheus, son of the Muse, for the first touch thereof will root thee to the spot, motionless and dumb, like him thou wouldst deliver."

He who thus spoke was an aged man of lofty stature and countenance mild but majestic, with

long, snowy hair and beard ; he wore the white fillet and laurel wreath of Apollo's priests, and a seer's netted mantle hung from his shoulders. With meet reverence, Orpheus gave him thanks for his warning, and asked who he was. " I ask not," he added, " how you know my name and parentage, for I perceive you are a seer." And even as he spoke, he marked with wonder the seer's shadow on the grass.

Then said the old man, " In me, Orpheus, thou seest not, as thou deemest, a living man, but one who alone of the dead wears yet his form of flesh and blood, by the especial grace of Queen Persephone. I am Teiresias of Thebes, whose life the gods prolonged over five generations of men, and gave me also the gift of prophecy, to atone for a punishment I had not merited. For while once in my youth I strayed by a river side, I came un-awares upon glorious Athena, as she bathed with a company of the Water Nymphs, and the sight of her smote me with blindness. Now because the virgin goddess had herself invoked that doom upon whosoever should dare look on her divinity disrobed, she could not restore my eyesight ; but because I had not sinned against her wilfully, she prevailed with Zeus and with Apollo to bestow on me the amends of which I have spoken. And

when Death claimed me at last, Persephone granted me this boon also, that with the same eyes so long darkened on earth I should behold her beauty, and all the hidden wonders of this Nether World."

"Great Seer," said Orpheus, "I heard your fame from the lips of the Muses, in the days of my childhood. Little dreamed I then that ever I should behold you face to face! It needs not to tell you on what errand I seek the House of Pluto, for you know things past and things present and things to come. But tell me, if it please you, who it is that sits charmed on yonder seat of marble; so noble are his looks that I long to undo the enchantment that binds him there."

"My son," answered Teiresias, "by the power of thine art thou canst indeed break his trance, even as thou didst stay the wheel of Ixion and the stone of Sisyphus. But there is no power in earth or heaven that can set free these captives until they have paid to the uttermost the price of their transgressions, for the law that the wrongdoer shall suffer late or soon is from of old, and standeth fast for ever. Forbear, therefore, to arouse Pirithous—so is this prince called—since that were but to frustrate the mercy Persephone has shown him in granting him oblivion of his

doom. Pass on thy way, or learn from me and not from him, why he dwells alive among the dead."

"Speak then, I pray you, wise Teiresias," said Orpheus ; "for this is the strangest sight I have seen in Hades, and the most piteous, and scarce can I look on it without tears. Alas, that strength and beauty like a god's should find no other end than this ! He looks, methinks, as the young Ares might, when the Giants he warred against prisoned him underground. And can it be that aught of evil housed in so fair a tabernacle ?"

"Good things strove to dwell there," answered the seer, "but one ill spirit drove them forth, and that was Pride. This Pirithous was the son of King Ixion, and like his father he feared not the gods, neither regarded man, but did whatsoever was right in his own eyes, trusting in his heart that he should never be cast down. Howbeit he was without guile, loving truth in word and deed, a brave and generous foe, and of all friends the most loyal.

"Now when Ixion vanished from among men, Pirithous reigned in his stead, and at that same time there arose a king in famous Athens, Theseus by name, whose prowess as a warrior was noised abroad through all the lands of Greece.

It was said this young champion had ridded his kingdom of the dreaded wild beasts and yet more savage robbers who infested it, with his single sword, and marvellous tales were told also of his adventures overseas. Pirithous listened greedily to all that he could hear concerning Theseus, until at last he grew so enamoured of him by report that he resolved to win his friendship at all costs. But in his pride he said, 'This bravest of men shall know me for his equal before I ask him to call me friend'; and straightway he led an army against Athens, and when Theseus with his host came forth to give them battle, Pirithous challenged him to single combat. And so equally matched were those two in strength and skill that neither could gain the least advantage, nor so much as draw blood from each other, long and desperately though they encountered; at last, when both were well-nigh spent, Theseus flung down his sword, and cried, 'Come to my arms, valiant stranger! Thou and I must be brothers henceforth, for in thee I have met my peer and my heart goes out to thee already.'

"Joyfully then Pirithous embraced him, and confessed his purpose in the challenge; 'I could not rest,' he said, 'until I had proved myself worthy, if not of thy love, Theseus, at least of thy sword.'

“ When Theseus heard this, he praised the gods who had sent him such a friend, and the two princes took an oath together to be true comrades to the death.

“ But after this the ambition of Pirithous passed all bounds, and not content to be equalled in renown with the most illustrious of mortals, he aspired to win yet greater glory by setting his strength against a foe divine. Yes ! in the madness of his overweening pride he boasted that he would go sword in hand to the palace of King Pluto, and carry off his Queen by force. Theseus would fain have dissuaded him from that impious raid, but Pirithous would heed no warning. ‘ Come thou also,’ said he, ‘ unless thy heart fails thee, that I deemed fearless as mine own. What ! Shall not our two swords put to rout a million phantoms ? Come, and thou shalt see how powerless against good steel are all those goblin shapes that old wives tell of to fright unruly babes. And when we have brought that fair Queen back to the light of day, we will cast lots whose bride she shall be, mine or thine.’

“ Then Theseus yielded, as was ever his wont, to his comrade of more imperious soul, and they went down together through the cavern of Taenarum. Now when they came to the portal

where Cerberus keeps guard, the triple-headed hound rushed upon them baying fearsomely ; but they drew their glittering falchions and brandished them as it were sudden lightning before his eyes, so that he cowered down amazed. And having passed that gateway, the two comrades saw a host of eldritch creatures barring their onward road : harpies, with the bodies and talons of vultures, and the heads of women ; fire-breathing Chimaeras in shape half goat, half lion ; the dreadful forms of the Furies, whose snaky locks dripped gore ; and all those grisly and nameless phantasms that haunt the dreams of madness. But on strode the undaunted pair, and clove their way with brandished swords through the crowd of gibbering shadows, and came to the Ferry of Souls. Nor durst Charon refuse them passage, for they seemed to him gods, or the sons of gods, so fair and terrible appeared they in their shining armour ; and with like awe did the troops of spirits stand at gaze while they hied along the asphodel meadows.

“It was of me that Pirithous asked guidance to the House of Pluto, and I led the way in silence, knowing the thing ordained.

“When we came even to this spot, Hecate, Queen of Witches, stood before us in her beauty

malign ; and with a deep obeisance she greeted both Theseus and Pirithous, praising their valour and wishing good fortune to their enterprise. And when they asked her who she was—

“ ‘I am the handmaid of Persephone,’ said she ; ‘your coming, gallant princes, is known to my Lady and mistress, who desires nothing better than to fly with you from her tyrant lord. She sends you word by me that you will fare best if you await here a signal that the moment is come to surprise King Pluto at his carousal. Rest yonder a little while, until you see the light of a torch that I shall wave from the palace gates ; then hasten forwards with a good courage, for all shall be well.’

“So saying, Hecate pointed to these marble chairs, and glided away amongst the trees. The two comrades seated themselves where the witch bade them—and knew too late the snare she had spread for them, and the awful power of the Nether Gods.”

Teiresias ceased, but his lips moved inaudibly, and he lifted his arms in the attitude of prayer. Still Orpheus lingered, and presently the seer turned to him and asked—

“Have I not told thee all thou wouldst know, my son ?”

"Not all," said Orpheus, glancing towards the empty chair, "since Theseus, as it seems, has escaped his doom."

"Yes, Orpheus," replied Teiresias, "for his guilt was not as his comrade's, seeing he but followed where Pirithous led. So for him there was pardon, and he reigns yet in fair-walled Athens."

"And could he leave Pirithous here?" cried Orpheus. "Was that the loyalty he had sworn?"

"Judge him not," said Teiresias, "until thou hast heard the rest. There came hither not long since that mighty Helper of men whose fame is gone out into all lands, even Heracles. For the King of Argos, whom he served twelve years by decree of Fate, laid many and grievous tasks upon him, and the last was that he should bring him the Hound of Pluto. So Heracles went down to Hades' gate, and seized the monster with his invincible hands, and would have dragged him straightway to upper earth, but there came to him a messenger from Pluto, offering ransom for Cerberus. Then Heracles said he would restore the Hound after showing him to the King of Argos, if Pluto would release unto him Theseus of Athens; for Theseus was very dear to Heracles,

and had done him service of old. So Theseus was set free, but he utterly refused to go with Heracles unless his comrade were delivered also, until Pirithous charged him in the name of their great love not to deny him one last boon.

“‘All else I can endure,’ he said, ‘but the bitterness of seeing thee suffer for my fault. Spare me that worst of pangs, my Theseus ; give me instead the solace of knowing thou dwellest free and glorious in the land of the living. Ah, trust me, I cannot be all unhappy in these bonds while it is well with thee, friend of my heart.’

“Thus did Pirithous prevail on Theseus to depart, and he took farewell of him even smiling, though Theseus could scarce speak for tears. But when the prisoner was left alone, Queen Persephone herself drew near him with compassionate looks, and on his head, bowed in silent anguish, she sprinkled juice of the white poppies she carried. And by the virtue of that sweet oblivious antidote Pirithous is lapped in the tranced slumber thou beholdest.

“Now, Orpheus, my tale is fully told, and I bid thee good speed ere we part ; a little further through the vale and thou comest to the House of Pluto ; enter boldly, for none will hinder thee, seeing thou hast found favour with our Queen.

In token whereof, know that by her command
I met thee here, to warn thee of the magic seat."

With these words the ancient seer departed
to his own place, and Orpheus hastened onward
through the dark cypress grove.

CHAPTER XV

THE PERFECT SONG

THE House of Pluto stood in the midst of a garden where white poppies bloomed and a fountain made faint music in the drowsy air. No other sound broke the stillness of that twilit pleasaunce ; it seemed deserted and given over to slow decay ; lichens stained the dark marble of the fountain basin ; rank grass waved high over the lawns ; and in the dim, green alleys pomegranate-trees stooped their boughs earthward under the load of ungarnered fruit. And as Orpheus came to the stately palace portal he marked how grey mould clung to lintel and threshold and the great house itself seemed well-nigh ruinous. Through the wide-flung doors he passed and through empty halls that echoed to his footfall, into a presence-chamber where a King and Queen sat enthroned. The King's gloomy brow was bent upon the ground ; his Queen

leaned forward a little, her beauteous head upturned, like one who hearkens for a summons, and below her diadem Orpheus saw a chaplet of Spring flowers. Now must the minstrel put his fate to the touch ; he struck a throbbing chord upon his lute, and with eyes fixed on Persephone began to sing. Such a song was that, the iron brow of Pluto relaxed while he listened, and when Orpheus paused he cried, "Sing on, minstrel divine ! I know thee not, but full surely thou art one of the heaven-dwellers."

"Dread King," answered Orpheus, "I am but a mortal, whom Death has not yet claimed."

"How hast thou dared, then," said Pluto, "to cross the unpermitted ferry ? What hope misplaced made thee so hardy as to adventure thyself in these realms whence none return ?"

For all reply Orpheus touched the lute anew, and the story of his love and grief broke from his lips in the self-same passionate strain the Muses heard erewhile. That supreme lay drew tears down Pluto's rugged cheek ; as the last cadence died away he turned silently to Persephone and laid his hand on hers. Joy dawned in the pale Queen's eyes. "Lord," she said, "these tears tell me that the minstrel has not pleaded in vain, else would I too entreat for him the boon he craves."

"It is granted, my Queen," answered he, and pointed with his iron sceptre towards the threshold. Orpheus turned and saw two figures standing there, and knew one of them for Hermes, the Shepherd of Souls ; the other, whom he led by the hand, was a bride, veiled and crowned, in her saffron marriage-robe. "Eurydice !" he cried in a broken voice, and sprang to clasp her ; but the wand of Hermes waved him back. "Touch her not, Orpheus," said Persephone softly ; "she belongs not to thee but to us until the moment when she sees again the light of the sun ; and by the law of the Nether Powers thou art forbidden to look on thy ransomed bride till then. Go now, happy minstrel, on the way wherein Hermes shall lead thee ; but take heed thou look not once behind, for Eurydice will follow with unveiled face."

Then Hermes, beckoning with his hand, went forth of Pluto's dwelling, and Orpheus followed, but not on the road he had come. For a little way beyond the garden of poppies they entered a door into a grey hillside ; there the Shepherd-god placed an arm about Orpheus and rose swiftly upward through gloom profound. But when light began to filter through the darkness and wafts of fresh, pure air blew in their faces, Hermes set him

gently down upon a rocky stairway that wound still upward out of sight. "I come no further," said his guide; "short is now thy path to the free light and air of heaven, that stream hitherward through a cavern's mouth."

"But Eurydice—is she with us still?" said Orpheus doubtfully.

"Hush!" answered Hermes. "She is close to thee as thy shadow. Speak not, look not back, but press onwards; reach but the cavern threshold, and all is won."

With that he was gone, and Orpheus hastened towards the increasing light. Breathlessly he listened for a footfall behind him, for the least rustle of a trailing robe—and heard only the beating of his own heart; still he toiled upward, wrestling at every step with an agony of longing. Soon the path ascended less steeply and the rocky vault rose higher overhead; already now he walked in subdued daylight and could see a patch of sky framed in the cavern arch. Then, at the very threshold of the fair, sunlit world, hunger for the beloved face beat down the barrier of his will; he turned and looked back into the shadows.

There stood Eurydice; one look into the dear eyes that clung to his,—one silent look wherein the whole of love was caught up and uttered once

for all—this much was granted him who for her sake had traversed the kingdom of the dead. But with the passing of that supreme moment her wistful face receded from him like a vision and was lost amid the cavern's inner gloom. Vainly Orpheus flung himself into the thickening shades, vainly called upon her name in a storm of weeping ; his outstretched arms clasped but empty air, and for all answer to his cries a mocking echo rang through the grot—"Eurydice ! Eurydice !"

Suddenly the ivory lute—the lute whose harmonies had vanquished Powers inexorable, only for this—was shivered in the minstrel's hand against some jutting rock, and fell at his feet with a drear and dying wail of the silvern strings. At that sound, as it were the knell of hope and light and life, he cast himself down in the darkness beside his ruined treasure and a deeper night closed over his soul.

Lying there tranced with anguish, Orpheus knew not whose faithful love sought and found him ; or how Calliope and her sisters bore him tenderly forth and took his broken lute to their keeping for ever. When he came to himself he lay alone on the hillside without the cavern ; and behold, a great stone was rolled to the mouth of its doorway. And presently he saw that the

mountain landscape around him was familiar ; these were the hills of Thrace, and not far off the Hebrus rolled down to the city of the ancient King. No will had Orpheus to bend his steps thitherward or stray further in the world ; here would he weep his life away beside the portal, closed to him for ever, where he had looked his last on her to whom that look was a second death. The gods never forgave ; not all his tears could atone for one moment's madness, and not of them would he implore his pardon ; but when at last Death made him free of the forbidden land he knew that Eurydice's smile of forgiveness would greet and bless him in the cheerless asphodel meadow.

So for a while he dwelt solitary, with roots and berries for his only fare. He gave no thought to his lost lute, and had it been restored to him he must have shrunk from the touch and sight of it, believing he had renounced utterly the art that had but half redeemed his loved one. But song was not dead within him, and soon it a little eased his burdened heart to sing, though falteringly and low, of the beauty and tender grace that were gone. Then it was that companions came to him on the pine-clad mountain ; stealthily they gathered about the singer and watched him with a dumb pity in their eyes. Lions and spotted

pards were there, and the velvet-coated deer, and many a gaunt grey wolf and prowling fox ; the wood-pigeon came fluttering from her nest on high, the bright-eyed squirrel left his hoard half garnered ; all the wild things, great and small, were drawn to the feet of Orpheus, listening to the voice that charmed away their feuds and fears.

Yes, many a day that gentle spell was wrought among the Thracian hills ; until the fierce, sleek beasts of prey would follow the minstrel, like a faithful guard, and lick his feet as they crouched before him, and the small birds would nestle on his shoulder ; nor lived there one of Earth's creatures but made lament for him when he was past away.

Now, on a moonless midnight Orpheus arose from the cavern threshold, for burning thoughts had driven slumber afar, and he wandered in his restless pain to the banks of Hebras. And suddenly torches flared about him, and a deafening uproar of drums and symbols, mingled with piercing cries, smote upon his ears. It was the wild-eyed rout of Bacchus, speeding to their revel on the mountains ; women all, they swept along in tumultuous whirling dance, with brandished ivy-wands and flying hair, to their own dinning music ; the divine frenzy was upon them, and

woe to him who crossed their path ! In an instant the foremost of the crew had sprung upon Orpheus ; ‘ A victim ! ’ they shrieked ; ‘ the god hath sent his priestesses a lamb for the sacrifice ! ’ Ah, what could his four-foot guard have availed him now ? In the strength of their god-sent madness the Handmaids of Bacchus would have torn a lion limb from limb. Not the lute Apollo gave, not the strain Pluto heard enthralled could have saved the minstrel ; the full-throated melody of all the Muses had been drowned in the tempest of barbaric dissonance that raged around him. As a swimmer sinks amid the roar of buffeting waves, so his fair, laurelled head sank in a whirlpool of tossing arms and maddened faces—to rise no more. . . .

The River Naiads, peering from their sedgy couch at break of day, saw a still, upturned face float by on the grey tide of swift-rolling Hebras. Golden hair made a glory round the pallid brows ; the lips, cold in death, yet murmured faintly the name of Eurydice. Then arose a voice of sighing and of weeping along the river-shores ; the voice of all the gentle Nymphs of meadow and stream complaining loud and crying, “ Orpheus is dead, is dead ! The sweet singer will never more return ! ” All the hills and vales echoed

back the cry, "Orpheus is dead!" and all the woods made moan for the beloved minstrel.

But on that day blossoms till then unknown shone fair in the island valleys of Elysium; for a new flower is born there whenever the souls of true lovers meet at last. And of such were Orpheus and his Eurydice.

Earth has grown old and sad since he wandered, lute in hand, through the green solitudes and dreamed his dream of the Perfect Song. To him alone of her minstrel children it was granted to sing it, in the Spring-time of the world; but in every age the same high dream has inspired the musician and the poet. Unsung, unheard save by the inward ear, that melody lives on eternal; its echoes found way through the sealed sense of Beethoven and haunted the pensive youth of him who, dreaming in English woodlands of the Muse-loved glades of Greece, longed for power to—

"Bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as, warbled to the string,
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made hell grant what love did seek."

THE END

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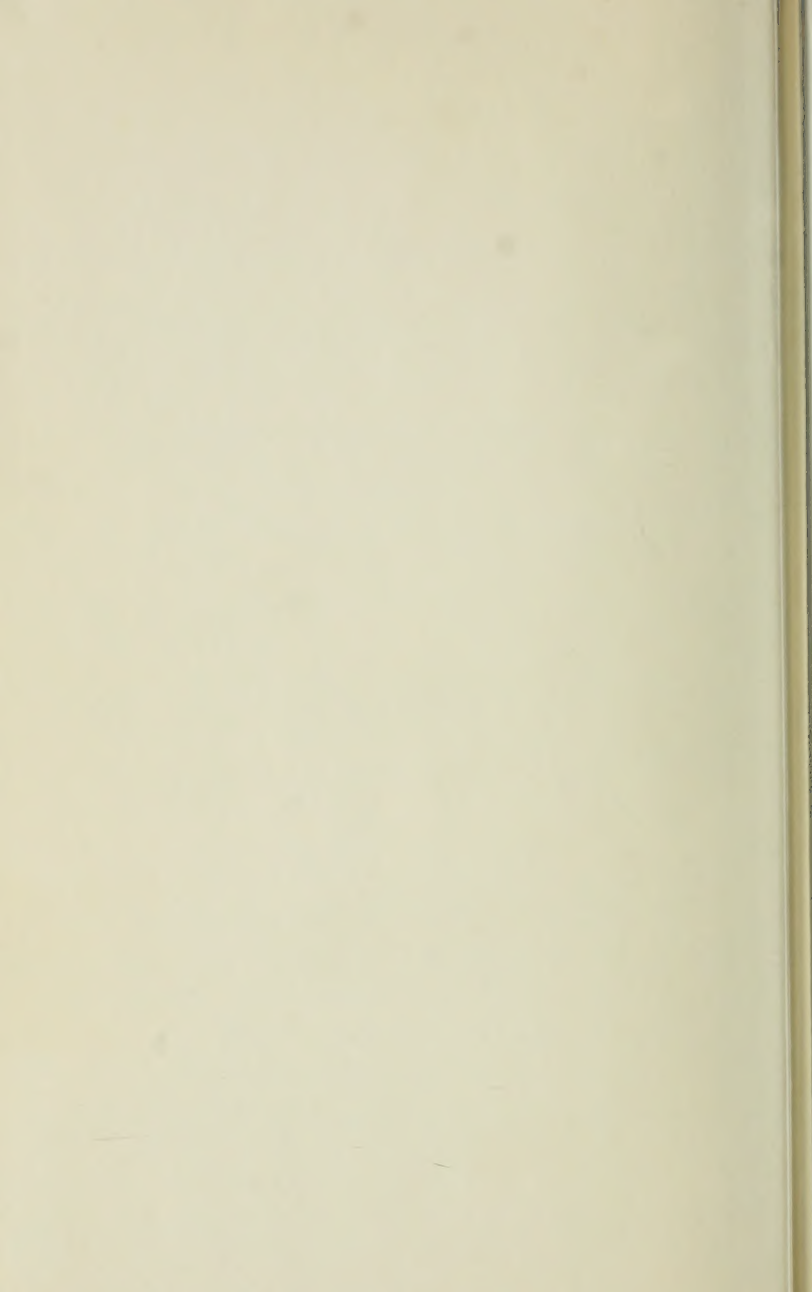
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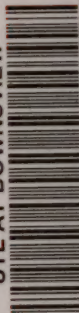
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